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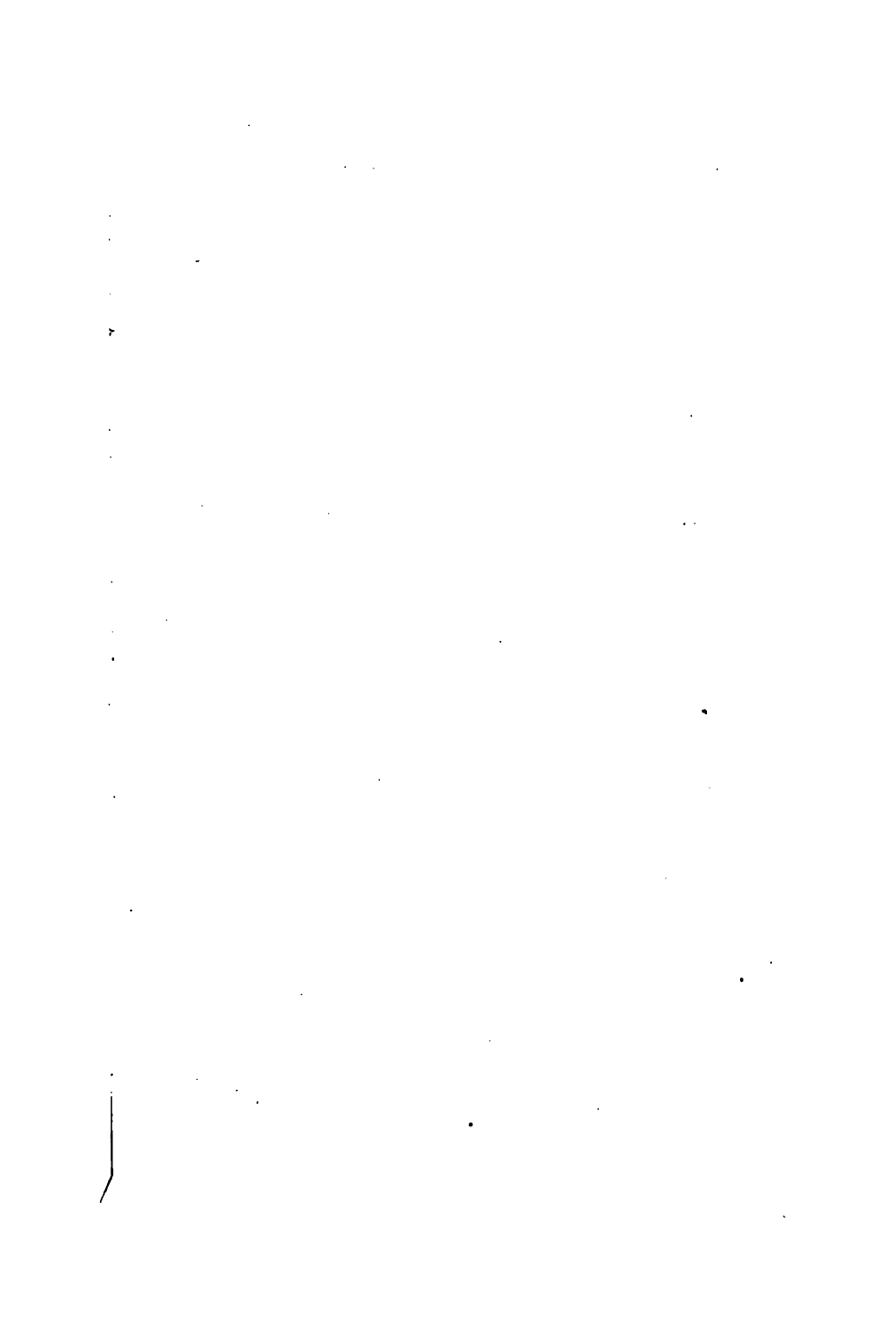


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" 'That's the one, you know, Charlotte,' he said, pointing up to the high dark window."

Page 33.

THE
CUMBERSTONE CONTEST.

A
STORY FOR THE YOUNG.

Fales

BY THE AUTHOR OF
'THE BEST CHEER,' 'THE BATTLE WORTH FIGHTING,'
ETC.



SEELEY, JACKSON, AND HALLIDAY, 54 FLEET STREET,
LONDON. MDCCCLXVII.

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THE CUMBERSTONE CONTEST.

CHAPTER I.

ALL through the long summer and autumn it was known that a great sorrow was coming to the quiet vicarage of Cumberstone. Mr. Warne, the vicar, watched its steady approach with an increasing weight of grief that it was difficult, at all times, to keep down; and the children of the house, who must have their daily play, whatever might be going to happen, took gradually to quiet games, so that their dear mother, lying in patient suffering on the dining-room sofa, or, later still, in her own chamber upstairs, should not be disturbed. At last it came, with the first fall of winter's snow; and the two younger children, Tom and Hetty, caught a glimpse from under one of the closed blinds, of a dark procession moving slowly down the white garden, and then fled away to a distant corner to sob out their little passion of grief.

Everybody in the village wondered that day how the poor motherless children would get on, but at the vicarage there was no anxiety on that score. Charlotte, the eldest, a steady girl of fourteen, had attended to the household matters during her mother's long illness, and knowing that a time would come when she should be obliged to go through her daily duties without any one to direct her, she had given her mind to the work with a thoughtfulness beyond her years. She had not much opposition to her gentle sisterly rule to fear from the other children. Frank, a fine boy of thirteen, and Willy, who was a year younger, were studying with their papa, and worked with a steadiness of purpose that left very little time to disturb the house by their rioting. Next to Willy came Tom, a little lad who liked play far better than work, but, being only ten, that fact was regarded as yet with a good deal of indulgence; and, as he and Hetty had shown more discretion than had been expected of them during their mother's illness, Charlotte hoped they would prove very tractable under her guidance.

On the day when the dark procession had wound its way slowly through the vicarage garden into the adjoining churchyard, Mr. Warne called the children one by one into his study. Charlotte, being the eldest, was the first to go. The room was so dark that she could scarcely see her father's face; but she crept closely up to him, and then sat gravely wondering what he had to say to her. By



his side was a little packet of letters. There were five, Charlotte saw, and Mr. Warne took up the thickest of them, and put it into her hand.

"This is from your mother, dear," he said; "she wished it to be given to you to-day." He paused a minute, and then added, "You will regard it, I know, as a treasure, only second in value to your Bible."

"Yes, papa."

Then Mr. Warne leaned back in his chair, and Charlotte sat silently by him holding her letter, till she was told to go away and send Frank to him. So each of the children had a letter that day from the kind mother who had just been taken away from them; even Hetty, who was the last to come out of her papa's study, wondering greatly what it all meant, and holding her little package tightly in her chubby hands. Charlotte was waiting for her near the door, and took the poor child tenderly in her arms.

"What is it, Charlotte?" she sobbed.

"A letter, dear, from mamma."

"Is it to say when she is coming back?"

"No; she is never coming back, Hetty. But some day, if we are good, we shall go to her."

Hetty said she hoped that it would be very soon, and clasped her arms closely round Charlotte's neck as they made their way along the dark passage to the dining-room. It was a bitterly cold afternoon. The snow was lying deep on the garden and the graves in the adjoining churchyard; and Charlotte

sat down with Hetty on the hearth-rug before the blazing fire. No one else was in the room but Tom, who was sobbing dismally in a distant corner.

"Don't cry, Tom," said Charlotte, "come and sit with us."

Presently Tom accepted the invitation, and curling himself up beside Charlotte, hid his face in her lap. They were very quiet for a little while, and Hetty, soothed by the warmth, soon fell asleep. Then Charlotte unclasped the letter gently from the child's fingers, and put it, for safe keeping, in her own pocket.

"Shall I take care of yours for you, Tom?" asked Charlotte.

"No, I mean to do that myself," sobbed Tom, "till I'm big enough to read it."

"But that will be a long time to wait. Shouldn't you like to hear it before then?"

"No, I must read it myself; that's what——" and he broke down into sobs again, and buried his face closer in Charlotte's lap.

"Do you know where Frank and Willy are?" asked Charlotte, when Tom's sobs were quiet.

"Yes, upstairs in their own room."

Charlotte thought she should have liked to creep away too, to put her precious letter in her Bible—the most honoured place she could think of—and perhaps have a quiet cry over it; but there was Hetty to mind, and Tom to comfort, so she stayed patiently where she was. All through her mother's

long illness, Charlotte had been her constant nurse and companion, and had let her own pleasure give way to theirs, till the habit had become quite easy to her. As she sat looking steadily into the fire, which was not fierce enough to make its close companionship unpleasant, her thoughts strayed away to the duties that were before her, and on which she knew her mother's letter would chiefly touch. Among these, which included a great many things—all her own old duties, and now some of her mother's—the house-keeping was most gravely pondered. In that there were two points to be specially studied—her father's comfort, and strict economy in the weekly outlay. Mr. Warne's living was not a rich one. It had been regarded, at first, as only a step to something better; but he had held it now for more than sixteen years, and had long given up hoping for further promotion.

The house, like the income attached to it, was very small. On the ground floor there was the dining-room, in which the three children were sitting; a little state apartment and their papa's study on the opposite side of the passage; and behind both, the kitchen, where their one servant, Nancy, had to carry on her various household operations. Overhead the accommodations were on the same limited scale. Frank had a small room to himself, Willy and Tom shared one between them, Charlotte and Hetty another, and Nancy had to screw herself into a sort of large cupboard, originally partitioned off from Mr. Warne's chamber

as a dressing-room, before the coming of so many children into the house had necessitated the relinquishing of that luxury. Yet small and crowded as the house was, all its arrangements till within the last month or two had been carried on with the greatest regularity. Each of its inmates had his own special work, and time for doing it, except perhaps Nancy, who had a strong objection to rules of any kind, and had therefore given her mistress, and latterly Charlotte, a good deal of trouble. She had been engaged shortly before Mrs. Warne's illness showed itself, and had brought from home untidy habits that were sadly out of place in the orderly vicarage. But Cumberstone was not a place for efficient servants, and so Nancy had been retained from a fear that if she left her place might be even more objectionably supplied. This evening she was showing her usual disregard for orders. Five o'clock, the regular tea hour, had struck some time before, but there was no sound even of preparation, as yet, from Nancy's kitchen.

"Tom," said Charlotte, at last, "will you go and tell Nancy she has forgotten our tea?"

"No," answered Tom, "we don't want any."

"Yes we do, Tom; but never mind, I'll go."

She put down Hetty, who was still sleeping, on the sofa, and went out in search of Nancy. But Nancy was nowhere to be found. A great many friends of her's in the village were anxious, just then, to know how the vicar and his children were, as they said, "taking it," and Nancy had, no doubt,

gone to inform them. Charlotte waited a few minutes for her; and then, not finding her return, she turned up her neat black cuffs and carried in the tea herself. By the time all was ready Nancy burst in, and finding her work had been done in her absence, looked rather ashamed.

"Dear me!" she exclaimed, "who'd have ever thought it was so late?"

"But you ought not to have gone out without leave, Nancy," said Charlotte, quietly; "you know it was not right."

Nancy tossed her head. No doubt she had been expecting to go on without the inconvenience of having any mistress over her for the future.

"Oughtn't to!" she repeated loudly. "Well to be sure, I didn't know things was going to be so strict!"

"There'll be no difference about that one way or the other, I hope, Nancy. We must each try to do our work just as well as if——" and there poor Charlotte broke down, and Nancy, who was not bad-hearted, apologized humbly for her pertness, and promised all sorts of good behaviour for the future.

The tea was a very sad one that night, but still it was better, as Charlotte had said, to have it. A message that it was ready brought Mr. Warne mechanically out of his cold dark study, and the cheerful look of the room and companionship of his children seemed to do him good. When the table was cleared Charlotte got out her work-basket, and

the boys their books. It had been their mother's desire that their duties should not be set aside for a single day after she was gone; and their endeavour to carry out her wish, though it seemed very tiresome at first, was really helping them to bear their trouble better.

As soon as she could the next day, Charlotte sat down to read her mother's letter. If it had come to her in the summer, she would have taken it, as she always did her Bible, to a little table by her bedroom window, and read it in the early morning sunshine; but at mid-winter there was not much time to spare before breakfast, and as soon as that was over, she had Tom's lessons to see to, and then her own, which she took with Frank and Willy in her papa's study. Neither of the boys had said anything about their letters. Frank had probably read his quietly in his own room, as Charlotte had done, and Willy too, but there was no saying what had become of Tom's. Charlotte wondered a little, of course, but she knew him too well to fear that he had put it carelessly away, and forgotten all about it. Sometimes she fancied Frank or Willy must have read it to him, but before long, she began to suspect that he was adhering to his original resolve of finding out its contents for himself. Being only ten, he was not very much advanced in his studies. He could read printed books very well, and some kinds of writing—that is, his own or the early performances of Frank and Willy—but there his capabilities in the deciphering line ended. His papa's

writing was Greek to him, and his mother's neat flowing hand scarcely more intelligible. But Tom went at his difficulty with sturdy perseverance. One day he hunted out from Charlotte's stores an old copy-book, almost the first she had used when she began running hand; and she found him, soon after, scribbling away at his self-appointed task with unusual diligence.

"What's that for, Tom?" asked Charlotte, for, being his instructress, she thought his putting himself forward without her help rather an irregular proceeding.

Tom blushed a little, and then informed her that he wanted to go into small-hand.

"But papa said six months hence would be time enough for that, Tom."

But Tom begged to differ in opinion; and, as Charlotte glanced over his queer hieroglyphics, it suddenly occurred to her that they were intended as a first step to the reading of his mother's letter, and so she readily undertook to get his papa's permission for his beginning small-hand the next day.

"Only wait till then, Tom," she said; "we must not disobey him even in trifles."

So Tom put away his book; but it was taken out again the next day with Mr. Warne's permission, and the advanced study entered on with great spirit. But still all his industry did not help him, Tom discovered at last despondently, to make out what other people wrote.

"And what does that matter?" asked Willy, to whom Tom had confided this fresh difficulty.

"Why, a great deal," returned Tom. "If I've got to write a letter to anybody, and he sends me an answer back, I should like to know what it said."

"But you haven't got any one to write to," said Willy.

"Never mind that; I might have, and I suppose I shall some day."

But Tom did not allow himself to be conquered. Odd scraps of letters began to accumulate in his pockets, and Charlotte, who thought it within her province to examine these receptacles occasionally, would have wondered what the strange collection was for if she had not been in his secret. Sometimes it occurred to her that it was not quite proper for Tom to be making free with stray bits of other people's correspondence, but he always asserted his right to select what he pleased from his papa's waste-paper basket; and, as she did not like to trouble Mr. Warne to decide the point, Tom was allowed to have his own way. The scraps that gave him most difficulty were from his Aunt Janet, an elder sister of Mr. Warne's, who wrote a small, faint, unsteady hand, highly irritating, no doubt, to many of her correspondents, but charming in Tom's eyes from the one fact of its extreme illegibility; and a fragment from one of her letters was always studied with peculiar relish. Now and then, when a word was made out, it was announced for the

benefit of anybody who might be sitting near; but as Tom's discoveries were few and far between, there seemed little fear of Miss Warne's secrets being betrayed. On one occasion, however, he was seized with a sudden desire to make out sense as well as words, a point about which he had so far been entirely indifferent.

"I say," he said, "here's *T o m*, that's Tom. I wonder what she's got to say about me."

"Perhaps you had better not find out," said Charlotte; "you might not like to know."

"Yes, I should," replied Tom. However, as Charlotte happened just then to have discovered two mistakes in his sum, he had to rectify them before satisfying his curiosity. Then, the sum being his last task that morning, he went back to Miss Warne's letter without any fear of further interruption.

"Now, then, here it is," he said, digging his own name through with his pencil; "and what comes next? Oh, *h a d*, had;" but the little word following was so puzzling that he had to give it up at last, and pass it over carefully copied out on his slate for Charlotte's inspection.

"Better," she said, after a few moments' grave study of the word.

"Better!" repeated Tom. "And what is it I had better do, I should like to know!"

"Mind your own business," said Willy, "and not go prying into other people's."

"But this is my business," returned Tom, "it's

part of my lessons. Now, then, 'Tom had better' *c o m e*, come; and here's a nice little word, *t o*, to; and here's another, *m e*, me. Well, to be sure, what's that for? Why am I to go more than any one else?"

"To teach you manners, I expect," remarked Willy.

"Perhaps there's a mistake," said Frank; "let me see."

He took the paper, and read aloud, "Tom had better come to me, as well as Hetty, at once, I think; and Charlotte must manage as well as she can till I am able to join you." Then, becoming suddenly aware that he was not doing a very honourable thing, Frank coloured, and put the scrap of writing into the fire.

"Oh dear! so she's coming!" said Tom. "I wonder who has invited her."

"Not papa, I am certain," said Willy, "or we should have heard something about it."

"Well, somebody must ask," said Tom; "because, if she *is* coming, we've got to make up our minds to it."

And, so far at least as he was concerned, it seemed likely that that would be a matter of some difficulty. Miss Warne was no particular favourite in the household, though nobody knew exactly why. Every summer within the children's memory she had paid Cumberstone a short visit, and they retained confused impressions of having been kept out of the way on those occasions more than they

quite approved of. Tom seemed the most cast down by the information he had foraged out that morning, perhaps from a guilty consciousness that, being the most likely to commit himself by a bit of mischief or a saucy speech, he had more reason than the others to object to Aunt Janet's coming. Frank and Willy went back to their studies with their usual gravity; but Tom tried in vain to give his attention to a fresh exercise, a note of invitation to a clerical meeting which his papa had received a day or two before.

"I thought you were to be housekeeper, Charlotte," remarked Tom, looking up suddenly from his uninteresting document; "isn't it your right?"

"Not unless papa wishes it," replied Charlotte.

"But he does," replied Tom; "at least I'm sure he can't want Aunt Janet."

"Oh yes, he may, Tom. I am very young, you know, and sometimes I'm afraid things do not go on so well as they ought."

"Why, who's been complaining?" asked Tom.

"Oh, no one; it isn't that. And then there are other things besides the housekeeping to be thought of."

"Why, what things?"

"Oh, seeing after Hetty and you, Tom," replied Charlotte, gravely.

But that was a point on which Tom could not be expected to feel any particular concern, and he told her he was quite ready to take care of himself.

"Yes, I know you are in one way; but that

isn't what I mean." And as Tom made a grimace, Charlotte felt more anxiously than ever that perhaps he was not being cared for in the right way.

"And besides," said Tom, "there's papa to look after us; one's enough, surely! In all events we don't want Aunt Janet."

"Well, we are not sure yet that she is coming," said Charlotte. "But if there's anything settled about it, of course papa will tell us."

So they met Mr. Warne at dinner that day, feeling a little anxious as to what he might have to announce; but he seemed so very much as usual, that Tom could scarcely fancy he was looking forward to such a check to the independence of the small members of the household as a visit from Aunt Janet must necessarily entail. However, when Mr. Warne rose from table he called Charlotte into his study; and Tom, not waiting for an invitation, chose to edge himself in at the same time.

"I want you to write to Aunt Janet, Charlotte," said Mr. Warne. "I've a letter from her somewhere here," and he searched about among the papers on his table.

"Perhaps you have thrown it into your waste basket, papa," said Charlotte, with a little conscious blush.

"Yes, very likely; but it does not matter. She wants to know how we are going on, Charlotte, and offers to come and help us; but you may tell her there is no necessity for that as you are doing very well, and I should be sorry to have her leave her

own home in such weather as this. Tell her I will write myself in a few days."

"Yes, papa."

Mr. Warne went into the hall to put on his great coat; and then looked in again to say a last word to Charlotte before going out.

"Thank her for her kind offer, Charlotte; and mind the boys send their love."

The next minute he was gone, and Tom, not seeing any further necessity for good behaviour, spread himself out on the floor with his heels in the air.

"You may give mine, Charlotte," he said, "as much as you like. And, I say, put it as strong as you can."

"Put what strong, Tom?"

"Why, about our going on well. Say—let's see—that Frank and Willy are good boys, and that I am first rate!"

"But I shall not be able to say anything while you lie kicking there. Do please go away, Tom, for I have so much to do this afternoon."

Tom betook himself off very unwillingly; but was soon back again, peeping in at the door.

"I say, Charlotte, have you done?"

"No," answered Charlotte, looking up with a distressed face, for the composition of a letter was rather a difficult affair to her, "I have hardly begun yet;" and in truth all she had written, so far, was "My dear Aunt."

"Oh, how slow you are! I'd have put it I

don't know *how* strong by this time. I say, you mustn't forget to tell her that old Sykes and Sarah Baines are laid up with the rheumatism."

"But she does not know either of them," objected Charlotte.

"Never mind that, she knows the rheumatism ; and so, I dare say, she's dreadfully afraid of getting it worse. And if you'll just say the snow came in through Nancy's ceiling last week, that will finish it all off."

But Tom was again entreated to go away ; which he did at last, feeling comfortably certain in his own mind that if the dictation of the letter to Aunt Janet were only left to him, she would never be seen in Cumberstone again from that time forth.

But poor Charlotte laboured on wearily. So far as her own doings were concerned she felt she could only "put it" very humbly indeed.

"We are all going on very nicely," she began at last ; "at least papa and the boys and dear little Hetty are ; but Nancy does not do so well as she ought, though perhaps that is partly my fault in not looking after her more. However, I shall be fifteen on the 6th of January, and hope that will make a difference. Papa says it is very kind of you to offer to come and help us ; but as we are going on pretty well—except Nancy, who has promised to do better—he hopes you will not disturb yourself yet, as the snow is very deep, and the poor people have not been able to get any water out of the pond for several weeks." Then, suddenly perceiving

that the pond had not much connection with Miss Warne's proposed visit, Charlotte sat for a few minutes thinking how stupid she was, and how much better Frank or Willy would have written the letter; and at last went across the passage to the other room to ask them if they sent their love to Aunt Janet.

"Yes, you may give her mine," returned Frank.

"But not mine," said Willy.

"Oh, Willy!" remonstrated Charlotte, "you forget that Aunt Janet is papa's sister."

"No, I don't; if it were papa himself, I wouldn't pretend to love him if I didn't."

So feeling her difficulties rather increased, Charlotte went back to finish her letter, and found Tom standing outside the window, with a very blue nose, and his coat thickly bespattered with snow.

"I say," he shouted, "isn't that letter done yet? because I'm off to the post."

Charlotte had to own that it was not, and again set herself down to her task, while Tom executed a wild Indian dance outside to keep himself warm.

"I have nothing more to tell you, aunt," Charlotte continued, "because so very little goes on in Cumberstone, except people getting ill; and as you do not know any one here, you will not care to hear about that. Papa says he will write to you in a few days, and the boys send their love—that is, Frank and Tom. And hoping you will accept mine, believe me, my dear aunt, your affectionate niece,

"CHARLOTTE WARNE."

The letter was faultless, so far as writing and spelling went, but the composition certainly might have been improved. It was the first she had written without her mother's assistance, and Charlotte's mental powers were rather of the steady than brilliant order. If she had called in the help of the little man outside the window, no doubt the result would have been an epistle calculated to astonish Miss Warne greatly. However, though she admired Tom's ready wit in a general way, Charlotte preferred on all important occasions to follow her own judgment. So the letter, neatly finished, was at last handed through the window, and Tom set off with it at full speed down the lane to the village. But if he could have guessed how very far Charlotte had been from following his advice to "put it strong," Tom would probably have dropped it into a snow-drift somewhere on his road.

In her conscientious desire to tell the truth, Charlotte had thought it best to own the fact that Nancy was not conducting herself satisfactorily; but had she not been afraid of alarming her aunt unnecessarily, she might have said that she was going on very badly indeed. Unfortunately for Nancy's fitness for her present place, she had an elder sister living with one of the rich county families, about two miles off, where the servants went on very much as they pleased; and Nancy thought it a fine thing to imitate their doings as far as she could. Mrs. Warne had always from necessity been extremely careful in her domestic expendi-



ture; but Nancy, fancying economy was only her mistress's way, thought that now the mistress was gone, the sooner the way went too the better. So she heaped as much coal into the grate in one day as had formerly been burnt, in an equally severe season, in two, and used all the other household provisions under her charge in the same wasteful manner. Charlotte did all she could to check Nancy's extravagance. In her letters to her aunt, she had said that perhaps the fault was in some measure her's for not looking after Nancy better; but there was really no lack of watchfulness on Charlotte's part. She had no hope, except in Nancy's own improvement, for nothing was ever locked up at the vicarage. During Mrs. Warne's lifetime this system had answered very well; but, with the check of her presence gone, Nancy did not hesitate to appropriate to her own use stores that she had no business to touch. Of course Charlotte's best course would have been to consult her papa in the matter; but among the directions for her guidance in household affairs that Mrs. Warne had left her was this :—"If any little difficulty should arise, always try to set it right yourself before taking it to your papa." And as it did not occur to Charlotte that the pilfering habit Nancy was acquiring was anything but a "little difficulty," she thought herself bound to follow the injunction implicitly. So, with her tea-canister in her hand, Charlotte went one morning into the kitchen, where Nancy was busy putting a new cap-front into her best bonnet.

"Nancy," she said, "shall you mind drinking milk-and-water till the next tea comes?"

Nancy nearly dropped her work in amazement at the question; but the next minute she had sufficiently recovered herself to declare that she should mind it very much indeed, for she had never been used to doing without things.

"Nor have we," returned Charlotte; "but we shall have to make up our minds to it now, for there is scarcely enough tea left to last for papa."

"Then I had better order some more, miss, when I go into town."

"No, you must not, Nancy. If we drink out our month's allowance of tea too soon, we must go without till the next comes."

"Go without, Miss Charlotte! I never heard of such a thing in my life! Why, at Fairlawu, Jane's only to say a thing's used up to get fresh."

"Very likely; but Jane is living with a rich family, and you are with a poor one. You must not forget that."

"Poor! Lor! Miss Charlotte, that's what you always say. It's a way you've got."

"No, it isn't, Nancy, it's the truth. Papa can only afford to let us have a certain quantity of things for the week—quite enough, you know, but not too much; and if we use them up before the time, we must go without till the next supply comes. I've thought a great deal about it, and I can't see any other way of getting right again."

"Can't you?" said Nancy, with a look of pro-

found astonishment in her round eyes. "Why, even my mother would be above trying such a way as that!"

"But it's no use being above anything, Nancy, when it has to be done. And tea is not the only thing we must stint in. I see that the currants and sugar are almost gone too, and miss several pots of jam; so that I don't know when we shall be able to have another pudding again."

Nancy turned away with rather a red face, and muttered something about never having heard of trifles being watched in that way before; but Charlotte took no notice of her rudeness. She was simply bent on making Nancy more trustworthy, and did not mind, provided she could only succeed in that, how much trouble and vexation the effort cost her.

Then, with her canister still in her hand, she went into the dining-room, where the boys were doing their lessons, to announce the poorer fare that they would have to put up with for the next week. Frank said "very well" without lifting his eyes from the book, but Willy grumbled, and Tom declared that he could never do his lessons on short commons.

"Nonsense, Tom," said Frank, "you'll be all the better for less pudding; and as for tea, you know you never drink it."

"Oh, don't I when I can get it! But I say, Charlotte, what are the short commons for? Has somebody gone and broken into the bank?"

"No, Nancy has not been so careful as she ought to with the things," returned Charlotte, who did not like to expose the whole extent of Nancy's misdoings even to her brothers.

"Then why don't you send her off?" said Willy.

"Because we might not get any one to do better. Besides, it's only fair to give her a chance first."

"Oh yes!" said Tom, "starve ourselves that she may feast! That's a fine chance, certainly. I only wish you'd give me such a one. Wouldn't the lessons go on first-rate."

"I dare say they would, and you too," said Frank. "Suppose you leave Charlotte to manage her own affairs."

But his pudding, Tom asserted, was a matter in which he alone was concerned, and that, therefore, he was bound to look after it, a fact that nobody could dispute; however, as Frank and Charlotte, two grand authorities, were against him, there was nothing to do but to submit.

So the plan of increased economy for the next week or two was carried out; and as Mr. Warne had a great many things to think of, and was given, besides, to little fits of absence, in which he wandered far away, no one, himself included, perhaps, knew exactly where, he did not notice that a small pot of tea was made night and morning for his sole benefit, or see the grimaces that Tom thought proper to make over his nice mug of milk-and-water.



However, one day, when the cold mutton had been carried out, Mr. Warne looked round expectantly; and then, finding that the table had been cleared while he was thinking of something else, he asked Charlotte why there was no pudding.

"Because Nancy has eaten it, papa," returned Tom, promptly.

"Eaten it!" repeated Mr. Warne; "what do you mean, Tom? She couldn't do such a thing?"

"But she has, papa," persisted Tom, "and to-morrow's too; you ask Charlotte."

Of course Mr. Warne did so, and Charlotte had to explain that as the currants were running short, she thought they had better do without a pudding that day; and Tom had a grave reprimand for having brought a false charge against Nancy.

As the week wore on, Charlotte was glad to see that her remaining stores were left untouched; but as this was not the result of any real reformation on Nancy's part she was but half satisfied. She wanted to make her honest if she could, and better in many ways, but it was so difficult to know how to begin. Her mamma had always said that no one became thoroughly bad all at once, that there were some small beginnings to every open sin, and as Nancy's helping herself so unscrupulously to the household stores was to Charlotte's upright mind a very serious misdemeanour, she wondered what the "small beginnings" were that could have led to it. If she could

only find out, she thought, it would help her so much in her efforts to make Nancy better. However, she puzzled over the question in vain, and was obliged, at last, to go to her papa for enlightenment. But even then she had no intention of betraying Nancy, and so simply asked him to tell her what it was that made people dishonest.

"That's a difficult question to answer," returned Mr. Warne; "I suppose it is a faulty education sometimes, Charlotte, and giving way in the first instance to sudden temptation."

Charlotte did not ask anything further for some minutes. She had a very slow mind, and preferred to ponder first what she had already heard. The faulty education, she argued, must be at the bottom of Nancy's dishonesty. It could not be sudden temptation, for, the store-closet having been open ever since Nancy had been in the house, she was used to that state of affairs, and therefore not overcome by any unexpected view of sugar and jam-pots. So having satisfied herself so far, Charlotte's next inquiry was what sort of education her papa thought a servant ought to have? Mr. Warne was engrossed with his own meditations that evening, or he would have connected Charlotte's two questions, and explained that by a "faulty education" he intended defective moral training. However, he only asked, a little absently, what kind of servant she meant?

"Such a one as Nancy, papa," returned Charlotte. "What ought she to know?"



"Well, the duties of her position first, dear, I suppose, like the rest of us ; and there I am afraid she is a little wanting."

"Yes, papa. And is that all?"

"No ; I am no advocate for ignorance in any class, and so to the practical duties I think we may add some proficiency in reading and writing, and a little arithmetic."

"Yes, papa ; how much should you say?"

"What, of the arithmetic ? Oh, the first four rules, perhaps."

"Thank you, papa." And while Mr. Warne went back to his meditations Charlotte took a scrap of paper out of her work-basket and wrote on it :—

"Things that papa thinks Nancy ought to know. First, the duties of her position. Next, how to read and write and do sums in the first four rules of arithmetic."

She carried this memorandum in her pocket all the next day ; and when the evening came, and the boys were busy over their lessons, she went into the kitchen to pay Nancy a visit. The tea-things, which had been taken out more than an hour before, were standing still unwashed on the table, a great fire was blazing up the chimney, and by the side of it sat Nancy, fast asleep. Charlotte looked round with a sigh, and thought that something must certainly have been left out of Nancy's education, though she did not know exactly what—whether it was the duties, the writing, or the sums. Then she waked Nancy gently up, and told her she wanted

to speak to her, but would come back presently when the things were put away.

"Why, can't I hear what you've got to say now, miss?" returned Nancy, who, when taken at a disadvantage, was given to being saucy.

"No, not till you have finished, because I shall want a clear table."

Nancy formed her own conclusions as to what the "clear table" was wanted for, and about half an hour after she put her head into the parlour with the announcement—

"Please, Miss Charlotte, your irons is ready."

"Irons!" repeated Mr. Warne, "what do you want with them, Charlotte, at this time of night?"

"Oh, nothing, papa," returned Charlotte; "it's only Nancy's mistake because I told her I wanted a clear table."

Mr. Warne looked satisfied, and no one inquired what the "clear table" was for, though Tom seemed rather curious about it, having some dim hope, probably, that Charlotte was relenting in the matter of household economy, and intended to treat him with a hot cake for supper. However, he would have been grievously disappointed if he could have peeped into the kitchen the next minute, and seen her spread out on the ironing blanket, which formed a nice clean table-cloth, his own little slate and reading-book.

"Lor! Miss Charlotte," said Nancy, "what's that for? Are you going to do your lessons out here?"

"No, Nancy ; I have come to teach you. Will you wash your hands and sit down ?"

Nancy did both, rather unwillingly, and then asked her young mistress what she was going to teach her.

"I can't tell you yet, Nancy. It will depend on what you know."

"If I was to choose," said Nancy, "it would be crochet. Nearly all the maids up at Fairlawn can do that."

But crochet was not down in Charlotte's memorandum, and so she steadily shook her head.

"I don't think that would do you any good, Nancy. Will you let me see how you can read ?"

"Read ! lor no, Miss Charlotte, I've got such a lot to do."

"And so have I, Nancy, but we must make time for this. Now, then, will you begin ?"

Nancy took the book with a very ill grace, and set off in a high key that must have reached Tom's ears in the adjoining room, but at the first long word she stopped, and looked rather uncomfortable.

"You must spell it," said Charlotte.

Nancy made a dash at the next word, hoping, perhaps, to find it easier ; but, being disappointed, she was obliged to go on as she was directed, after which the reading proceeded more steadily. Then Charlotte set her an easy sum in addition, and told her she should give her a copy the next evening.

"Well, to be sure, Miss Charlotte! why you're going to make 'em regular lessons."

"Yes, I hope so, Nancy, and that you will get on."

The sum seemed a dreadful affair. However, with a little help from Charlotte, Nancy blundered through it at last, and, when it was done, she looked rather proud of her achievement.

"And then there are the duties, Nancy," said Charlotte, thinking of the first entry in her memorandum, "I don't know how we shall manage about them."

"Duties, Miss Charlotte?"

"Yes, your duties, Nancy—the work you have to do every day. I am afraid I don't know much about that."

"Of course you don't, miss; it isn't fit you should."

"Yes, it is, Nancy. It would be no disgrace to me, and then I could show you; there are so many things you might learn to do better, you know."

"Well, I don't see as there's much fault to find. I'm sure I do my best."

"No, you don't, Nancy; we can none of us say that. When I think over what I have done in the day, before I go to sleep at night, I can never find anything to be satisfied with."

"Dear me, miss, there's no need to be so particular."

"Oh yes, there is, Nancy. When God tells us that whatever we have to do we are to do it heartily

as unto Him, He means that we are to try to please Him in our work through all the week just as much as in our service on the Sunday."

"But there isn't many people as trouble their heads about that, miss."

"Oh yes, there are, Nancy. Papa does, I know, and the boys too sometimes; but they are young yet, and will do better as they grow older, I hope. But now I must go back to my work, and, if you can be ready to-morrow, we'll begin earlier."

Nancy made no objection, and, from that time, her lessons became as regular a part of the day's work as Frank's or Willy's. She did not make very rapid progress, but Charlotte, who looked for results chiefly in her store-closet, was quite satisfied. There Nancy's improvement was strikingly manifest; but Charlotte, in her humility, set it all down to the sums and copies, never supposing that the religious and moral training which she diligently bestowed on Nancy at the same time, might have something to do with it. Lessons were a very important thing, Charlotte reflected gravely, and, the first time she went into town, she bought an A B C book for Hetty, thinking she could not begin to teach her too early.

CHAPTER II.

VERY little idling went on in the vicarage of Cumberstone. Mr. Warne was certainly the hardest worker in the parish, though many of his neighbours, who did not know how much harder it is to toil with the head than the hands, often envied him his easy life. Next to Mr. Warne, as a worker, came Frank. He slept with his books beside his pillow, and was poring over them by the first streak of dawn in the morning, and the last gleam of candlelight allowed in the vicarage at night. It was an understood thing that he was to follow his father's profession, and a legacy left to his mother, a short time before her death, had, at her particular desire, been put aside to pay his college expenses. So Frank's prospects were tolerably bright, but he did not allow that circumstance to interfere in the least with his own unwearied exertions. Charlotte was equally diligent, but her duties consisting in a great measure of what Tom called "girls' work," which meant sewing, pudding making, and assisting in other domestic operations, were not so hard as Frank's constant application. Char-

lotte had a great admiration for Frank, and, though he was a year younger than herself, always looked up to him as being far better and wiser than she was. He had been deeply attached to his mother, and so it was expected that he would have felt her loss bitterly; but, rather to the disappointment of lookers-on, Tom included, who could only understand the demonstrative kind of grief, he kept on with his work during those short winter days that followed his mother's death, as though nothing had happened to disturb him.

Charlotte, however, was better informed as to what Frank really felt. More than once she had found him in his own room, crying over his mother's portrait, or the letter she had left him; and then Charlotte had gone quietly away, saying nothing to Frank or any one of what she had seen, but trying to make the blank in his home less evident to him by her watchful care for his comfort. It was a good thing for the other children that their elder brother and sister were so steady and thoughtful. Willy was anything but a model; still he was a good boy in many ways, and almost as diligent as Frank, who, in that respect at least, he delighted to imitate. Tom and Hetty, who were generally put together, though there was a gap of some years between them—Tom being ten, and Hetty only four—were, as Charlotte tried to think, too young for any one to expect much of them; and though they gave her a great deal of trouble at times, she fancied, on the whole, that she had no

reason to be dissatisfied with them. Different as they were in ages and character, there was the strong bond of love between the children, making it pleasant for them to give way to each other. And matters went on so peacefully in the little household, that Mr. Warne, who, notwithstanding those far-off mental journeys that he was in the habit of taking, saw a great deal more that passed around him than people supposed, seemed to grow daily more reconciled to his sad loss, and sometimes told Charlotte and Frank that they were a great help and comfort to him.

In the village there was a good deal of pity felt for the motherless children, and Nancy's communications as to their doings were eagerly listened to. At first she had been very ready with her tattle, especially on the point of Miss Charlotte's economy; but as her studies advanced she grew more discreet, having probably discovered, in her quiet talks with her young mistress, that the private affairs of a household were not a proper subject for discussion beyond it.

Charlotte's other pupil, little Hetty, did not progress so favourably. The sight of her A B C book was sure to bring the great tears into her eyes, and before the lesson was over she was generally either half asleep or sobbing piteously. Certainly the book was not in itself, as Hetty said, by any means attractive. There was but one picture in it, an old dame with a birch in her hand, and half a dozen children before her; and Tom having taken upon himself to explain this illustration, and call the old lady with



the birch Mother Crabsticks, Hetty had turned away with a shudder, and could not be persuaded to look at it any more. Charlotte tried to impress upon her that the fault was in herself and not in the book ; but Hetty was slow in taking up that view of the case, and at last Charlotte had to put the A B C book away, and ponder gravely as she sat over her sewing what she should do to make her like it.

"It's no use to try," sobbed Hetty. "Old Mother Sticks always makes me naughty, and I can't help it."

"Tom shouldn't have called a nice book by such a silly name," said Charlotte ; "I expect that has set you against it."

And then, as she stitched on, she wondered if Hetty could be induced to take a fancy to a pretty A B C book, one with brightly-coloured letters, and no Mother Crabsticks for a frontispiece. It seemed likely, and so she took a shilling from her own private store early one afternoon, and telling Tom the errand she was bent upon, asked him if he would go with her into the town. Of course he was quite ready, and, by way of reconciling Hetty to their absence, she was informed that they were going to bring her home a brilliant A B C book, which was to take the place of Mother Crabsticks for the future.

But Mother Crabsticks was to darken poor Hetty's world a little longer. In passing through the village, Tom and Charlotte looked into the infant school when the bell had just rung out for the

afternoon muster. It was not at all in Charlotte's way to dawdle on her errands; but many of the children were about Hetty's age, and so it seemed part of her business that afternoon to go in and see how Miss Brown taught them.

It was a pleasant sight to see the little creatures take their places, and sing song after song to any lively accompaniment of stamping or hand-clapping that Miss Brown chose to suggest. Tom got so excited that he joined in, and capered higher than any one else—a performance that seemed likely to bring matters to rather a riotous crisis; and then Miss Brown had to restore order again by a little quiet catechizing. But this not being so entertaining, some of the younger ones began, like Hetty, to get sleepy and cry; then they were called down one by one to the broad high fender, where they clustered like bees, some having the good fortune to secure a front place, and others being obliged to wait patiently behind to take their turn. One of these expectants, who stood near Charlotte, seemed half clad, and had his hands sadly swollen with chilblains.

“Why don't you jump?” she asked, when the stamping, headed by Tom, had begun again.

“Because my feet are sore, and it hurts them.”

Charlotte took his little hands, and tried to warm them by holding them gently in hers.

“You'll be glad when school's over to run home and get warm, won't you?”

"No, I like being here best, because there's hardly any fire at home."

"How is that?"

"We haven't got much firing, and father's ill."

Charlotte was very sorry to hear that, and as the best comfort she could give, asked a sturdy little fellow, who was holding tight on to the fender, to move a little aside, and put her small friend in his place, where he stood thawing his chilled limbs in dreamy content. Then the stamping having subsided, and Tom's interest in the proceedings cooled in consequence, he and Charlotte turned out into the lane again. It was bitterly cold, and Tom set off at a run; but Charlotte made no attempt to keep up with him, and before he had gone far, Tom danced back to inquire when she thought she should get into town at that pace.

"I don't know, Tom; I have half made up my mind not to go. Did you notice Johnny Barker?"

"No, I didn't; and if I had, what has he got to do with it?"

"Why, he has hardly any fire at home, because his father is ill. And as that is the case, Tom, I hardly know whether it would be right to spend all this money on Hetty's book."

Tom walked on slowly for a minute in grave deliberation, and then proposed that they should go at once to the Barkers' cottage, and see what was amiss.

So they went, and found Johnny's father shivering by the side of a miserable fire, and his

wife looking almost as white and thin as he did. Charlotte sat down and listened to a piteous history from both of poor John Barker's sufferings, and then she looked inquiringly at Tom.

"Yes, but whose is it?" he asked under his breath.

"Mine," replied Charlotte; and as this information was followed by some energetic nods from Tom, she put her shilling shyly down on the table, saying that it would buy them some fagots.

"Oh, but we didn't speak for that, Miss Charlotte," said Mary Barker.

"No, I know you did not. We came to bring it to you—at least, we had almost settled to do so—and you won't mind taking it, I'm sure."

Mary put the shilling in her pocket, with a word or two of hearty thanks; and then the children took their leave, promising to call again soon to see how John Barker was going on.

"I can colour her up," said Tom, as he tore along homewards—"Mother Crabsticks, you know, and make her look better tempered, and then Hetty won't mind."

Mother Crabsticks was the great trouble on Charlotte's mind just then, and she was not quite sure that she had acted rightly in the disposal of her shilling. Hetty, of course, being her charge, ought to come first, and if the ugly book made her dislike her lessons—those lessons that were to make her good—what would become of her? It was a perplexing matter altogether; and when she saw

Hetty's eager face at the open door, and heard her shout of delight over the expected book, Charlotte was more in doubt than ever as to what she ought to have done.

"Here, you wait a bit," said Tom, as Hetty held out her hands. "Come, there's nothing like old friends, you know. They're the best, after all."

But Hetty did not understand this, probably from never having regarded Mother Crabsticks in the light of a friend, and still clamoured for her book. Charlotte led her upstairs to the little room they shared together; and then, taking her in her arms, asked her if she remembered Johnny Barker.

"No," answered Hetty.

"Then I'll tell you what he's like. He is a dear patient little boy, a great deal smaller than Tom, and his hands and feet are all covered with chilblains."

"Oh dear, why doesn't he keep them warm?"

"Because his father is ill, and cannot earn fire enough."

"Then he must come here, and we'll warm him."

"No, there isn't room for him, Hetty. Papa has as many children now as he can take care of. But shall I tell you what I think we could do? We might each spare him something of our own. Would you be very sorry if you heard that I had

given Johnny the money that was to have bought your little book?"

Hetty thought she should, and began sobbing a little.

"But I'm sure you wouldn't mind, if you could see Johnny's hands."

Hetty asked what they were like, and when she heard that they were very red and swollen, and had worse places on them than that dreadful burn she remembered on Nancy's finger the week before, she grew a little more reconciled to her disappointment.

"But I'm not to like the other one, Charlotte, am I?"

She was thinking of Mother Crabsticks, and Charlotte, not seeing how it was to be avoided, told her she was afraid she was. Then Hetty grew a little rebellious again, and declared she couldn't for all the chilblains in the world; however, when Tom got out his colour-box, that evening, and went to work on Mother Crabsticks, with the conscientious intention of making, as he said, the best of her, Hetty was so enamoured with the result of his labours, that she took to the old lady from that time forth.

The next day was that important 6th of January that Charlotte had made grave mention of in her letter to Miss Warne, and as soon as it was light, Tom was clamouring at her bed-room door.

"I say, Charlotte, what are we to have?"

"Have!" repeated Charlotte, as she opened her door. "What do you mean, Tom?"

"Why it's your birthday, you know. Did Nancy make us a cake yesterday?"

"No, I thought it would be best not. We couldn't have enjoyed it."

"Oh, couldn't we?" replied Tom; but, as he stared at Charlotte, he saw there were tears in her eyes, and understood what she meant—that this was the first birthday that had come to them since their mother's death, and he went downstairs considerably sobered.

Mr. Warne and the two elder boys had evidently forgotten the important event of the birthday; however, they were reminded of it by the arrival of a letter from Miss Warne, containing a separate note, and the present of half a sovereign for Charlotte. It was very kind of Aunt Janet to remember her birthday, Charlotte thought; but then the note contained such precise injunctions as to how the money was to be spent that she felt almost sorry it had been sent.

"I say," said Tom, "arn't you rich?"

"No," returned Charlotte, "here's a list of things I have to buy with it."

"Oh, who cares for that! I'd burn it, and make out another."

"Oh no, Tom, that wouldn't be right. But I should have been glad to give something to the Barkers if I could. I wonder whether Aunt Janet would mind."

Mr. Warne looked up from his share of his sister's triple inclosures, and the difficulty was submitted to him.

"You had better let me see the list," he said.

It was handed to him, and, after he had gone through the different items with a gravity worthy of the occasion, he said he was afraid there was no choice for Charlotte but to take the gift, with the directions attached to it.

"But I could do without the mittens, papa, as the pair I had at the beginning of the winter are quite good still. Perhaps if Aunt Janet knew that, she would let me spend the money for them on something else."

"But she does not, you see, and it is hardly worth while to consult her about it. So suppose you buy a new pair as she directs, and give the old ones away. There are plenty of cold hands in the village that would be glad of them."

Of course there were. Charlotte remembered Johnny Barker's instantly, and thought that, with a little contrivance, she could make the old mittens suit him nicely. So there was something saved out of the half sovereign for Johnny's necessities, and she began to look upon it with more interest. There was some wool to be bought for a pair of stockings, too, and Miss Warne had not stated who they were for, so perhaps she would let her dispose of them as she pleased when they were done.

"And then it won't be so bad," she whispered to Tom, "a pair of mittens for Johnny, and perhaps

some stockings for his father. I must make haste and get them finished."

But Tom turned away in disgust. The half sovereign only represented to him the total of a sum in "Bills and Parcels," a rule he meant to keep clear of as long as he could; and having on his mind the further provocation of there being no cake and no holiday on a birthday, he prepared for his lessons in great exasperation.

But things were not going to be quite so bad that day as Tom expected. Mr. Warne went into his study soon after, and as Charlotte passed his open door to give some directions to Nancy, he called her in to him.

"I haven't given you my good wishes, yet, dear," he said, kissing her tenderly; "you must forgive me for the omission. Have you had the usual treat prepared?"

"No, papa," faltered Charlotte, "I thought it would be better not."

"But that was a mistake. When your dear mother said your work was to go on as it had always done, she meant to include your pleasures too. The boys must have their holiday, and I'll bring home a cake with me from the town."

Charlotte thanked her papa in her usual quiet way, and his next thought was about the present, which he had never failed to have ready, so far, on every birthday in her memory.

"You must choose what you would like me to give you," he said,

Charlotte reflected in some perplexity. She could not make up her mind to go without the birthday present altogether, which she should prize highly as coming from her dear father, but the necessities of the poor Barkers weighed heavily on her mind. So, at last, she asked Mr. Warne to let her have half the value in money, and buy her something very small—a pen-wiper, or pair of scissors with the rest. Then, fearing he might think her covetous, she added she did not want the money for herself.

“No, I suspect it is to follow the shilling you gave away yesterday,” said Mr. Warne.

“Yes, papa,” replied Charlotte, blushing, “did Tom tell you?”

“No, I heard it from the Barkers themselves. It was quite right as it happened, Charlotte; but, for the future, I hope you will never give anything in the village without having consulted me first. There are two shillings for you, and I promise not to ruin myself over the present.”

“Thank you, papa. And when may I take them to the Barkers?”

“As soon as you please; their necessities could scarcely be greater than they are at present. Next week I hope to see Barker at his work again.”

Charlotte put away the two shillings with the half-sovereign Miss Warne had sent her, feeling that a surprising accession of wealth had come to her that morning; and then went back to announce the holiday and coming cake to the boys. Tom, of

course, was the most elated by the news, and he was off at once with Willy on some delightful expedition; but happening to remember, before he had gone far, that an important matter had been forgotten, he dashed back to shout through the window :

“ I say, we’re to have a pudding all the same, you know ; and tell Nancy to make it large ! ”

Frank would no doubt have preferred to pore over his books for the rest of the day, but that would have seemed unkind to Charlotte ; and so he told her he would read some pleasant story aloud if she would fetch her work.

“ But I can’t sit down yet, Frank, thank you,” answered Charlotte ; “ Nancy is so busy that I suppose I must make the pudding, and then there’s Aunt Janet’s letter to answer.”

“ Very well, I’ll keep on till you have done,” and Frank went back to his books.

The pudding was soon made, but the letter to Miss Warne was a more serious affair. Her kindness in remembering the birthday, and sending the half-sovereign had to be gratefully mentioned ; but in her conscientious desire to be truthful, Charlotte found it a difficult matter to express herself so warmly as she would have wished. Then there was the perplexing business of the stockings to enter on ; and in her anxiety to make Barker’s case appear, as Tom would have expressed it, sufficiently “ strong,” she involved herself in a variety of complications, that no amount of stops and capitals would afterwards set right.

"You did not say who the stockings were for," she wrote, "and so I hope you will let me give them to John Barker when they are finished, as he wants them very much, for he has a large family; and all the winter, through being ill, and the hard frost, and poor little Johnny having his hands covered with chilblains, they have not known how to get on; so I hope you will let me make the stockings for him, particularly as papa does not want any nor the boys."

She did not know what she could say further on the point, and so went to other matters, noting down at some length the decided improvement in Nancy, which was, as usual, ascribed to the lessons. By the time the letter was finished, Mr. Warne came back bringing a nice cake, and the present, which proved to be a neatly-bound church service instead of the pen-wiper or scissors Charlotte had modestly suggested. She was afraid he must have made too large an outlay for one day; however, as he seemed perfectly satisfied with it himself, she put the cake and a bottle of home-made wine on the side-board for an afternoon feast, feeling that perhaps it was better, under any circumstances, to be happy on a birthday.

So happy they certainly were, though in a quiet way that Charlotte and Hetty could appreciate, perhaps, better than the boys. They had no heart for the merry games they had enjoyed round the fire the year before; but, while the cake and wine were leisurely partaken of, Frank read a story aloud

about two boys running away to sea, and getting drowned, which sent Mr. Warne and Hetty to sleep and made Tom, who had already decided on being a sailor, declare that he would manage better than that.

"But suppose the boat sank with you in it?" said Willy.

Tom could not explain, just then, what he should do under those circumstances; however, he thought things would come right somehow, at which there was such a laugh of derision, that Mr. Warne waked up, and Hetty, hearing what all the noise was about, began to cry, and hoped Tom would never run away. But Tom did not attempt to pacify her anxiety on that point, feeling that he could not do so conscientiously. Running away was, in his opinion, a fine independent start to take in life, though he did not know exactly why. His papa had never made any objection to the sea-faring scheme, and for all Tom knew to the contrary, would let him carry it out quite peaceably; but still, connected with it always, as the only right way to begin, was a rope and an open window; and so, when the wind blew hard at night, he often lay awake, packing his little bundle in imagination, and planning which way he should go.

"But suppose I came back an admiral," said Tom, "what would it matter then?"

Hetty seemed to think it would matter just as much. However, as Charlotte gravely told her that Tom would never run away unless papa gave

him leave, she dried her eyes, and began to watch the chestnuts Tom was roasting with great glee. Then Mr. Warne, as Frank could not see to read any more, undertook to tell the next story, if he could only keep awake.

"And if you don't, you know, papa, I can poke you," said Tom.

With this understanding the story was begun. It was very grave, but stirring here and there; and, as usual, Mr. Warne did not tell the name of his hero, but left it to be guessed at the end.

"Luther," said Frank, as soon as Mr. Warne had finished.

"Oh, of course, you can guess your own story," said Tom; "but Charlotte's ought to have come first to-day."

Mr. Warne had not intended his story more for the edification of Frank than the others. However, the children were in the habit of appropriating whatever seemed to fit in with their future plans; and as Frank was to be a clergyman, and, of course, a remarkable one, the story of the great reformer was supposed to belong to him.

"Do you want a story, Charlotte?" asked Mr. Warne.

"Yes, papa, if you please."

Mr. Warne closed his eyes for a minute or two, and Tom, thinking he had fallen asleep, was just going to give him the promised poke, when he opened them again to ask if a picture would do as well as a story.

"Yes, papa, if it's painted," said Hetty.

She was thinking of the wonderful transformation Tom's colour-box had effected in Mother Crabsticks; but Mr. Warne said he could not promise much in the colouring way, as the tints at his command were very sober indeed.

"Then they'll suit Charlotte all the better, papa," said Frank.

So, being prepared for something rather dismal, the children were not much surprised when they found that the picture they were to be favoured with was the inside of a prison, though Tom thought that it was not exactly the place for Charlotte to be introduced to on her birthday. However, they soon got interested in its inmate—a calm, stately-looking old man, who had plenty of noble friends outside his prison—but, above all, a dear daughter, who was ready to cheer him, at all risks, with proofs of her devoted attachment. Points in the past history of both were touched on, to give the eager listeners some clue to the prisoner's identity; but when it was further stated that he was to be led out to execution the next day, and that his daughter would have suffered in his stead with a brave heart, if she could, Tom thought the story, on the whole, would do very well for Charlotte, as he was sure that, in like circumstances, she would act precisely in the same way.

"Well," said Mr. Warne, while Tom was cudgelling his brains to recall the names of the very limited number of heroines he was acquainted

with, and Frank and Willy were smiling—"Who is it?"

"Sir Thomas More and his daughter Margaret," replied Charlotte.

Then Willy's story followed, and afterwards Tom's, which was the lamentable history of a naughty boy, who ran away to sea one dark night, and got drowned—an unsatisfactory termination to the affair, which put Tom out of temper, and made him accuse his papa of passing off for his own the story Frank had just read—an accusation that Mr. Warne, having been asleep through the greater part of it, could conscientiously deny.

There remained then but one story to be told—little Hetty's—and as Mr. Warne could not remember any young lady who had gone through surprising adventures at four years old, he talked to her about a pretty bird that built its nest upon the ground, but went up far into the sky to sing its song, and, without waiting for the lesson the little bird's ways were to teach her, Hetty screamed out that it was a robin—a mistake which was at once set right by Tom, whose eyes were oftener on the birds and their doings than on his lessons.

It seemed hard that Mr. Warne should not have his story too; and Hetty, who felt the omission most keenly, asked Frank or Charlotte to tell him one.

"And what is it to be about?" asked Frank.

"Some one who is very good, and has five boys

and girls to take care of him," returned Hetty, who wanted the application to be unmistakable.

Frank said he was afraid he could not oblige her; and so Mr. Warne proposed that they should talk and read by turns, which they did, over the bright winter's fire, till the birthday came to an end; and Charlotte, as she wished her papa good night, told him how much she had enjoyed it.

CHAPTER III.

THE next day was a very busy one, for the holiday had left the work a little in arrears, and Tom and Hetty were so idle over their lessons, that Charlotte began to wonder whether holidays were good things for people, after all. However, the books were put away at last, and then she and Tom started for the town, leaving the two shillings at the Barkers', on their way. Their errand was to spend Charlotte's half-sovereign—a business in which Tom took so little interest, that if it had not been for the pleasure of kicking up the crisp snow as he ran along, he would just as soon have been at home.

"It's what I call a cheat," said Tom, "making a pretence to send a half-sovereign, and then not letting you have a penny out of it yourself."

"But the things are for me, Tom, when they're bought," said Charlotte; "and, perhaps, if they had all been sent nicely packed in a parcel, I should have been quite pleased with them; so I try to look at it in that way."

"Oh, very well; you may look at it how you like, but anyway, I say it's a cheat."

When the town was reached, they made their purchases in the order in which they were noted down, so as to avoid mistakes, though that plan involved a good deal of unnecessary plodding to and fro. When they came to the book, which stood third on the list, Tom's spirits revived a little.

"I say, choose something lively," he said, "something about running away, you know."

"But we mustn't have any stories, Tom, I don't think Aunt Janet would like it."

"Oh, dear! then have what you please, I don't care," and Tom moved off to the other end of the shop.

Charlotte had a little plan of her own about the spending of the two shillings destined for her book, which she thought she could carry out without offence to any one, and she asked the shopman if he had any first reading books at that price.

"No," he said, "he was afraid not;" and he spread out on the counter a good choice of little shilling volumes, and one nice copy of "Reading without Tears," which Charlotte admired very much, and felt sure Hetty would like too, but then it was beyond her price, and so she had to give it up with a sigh, and choose, at last, the biography of somebody she had never heard of, but which had the recommendation of being as free from the lively tendency Tom had voted for as possible.

Then the other things were bought, and they started homewards, Tom marching on with his

hands in his pockets, and not offering to take charge of one of the packages.

"Would you mind carrying the book, Tom?" asked Charlotte, "my hands are so cold."

"Yes I should; but you may give me the wool, if you like, that's the warmest;" and Tom proceeded to keep up his own circulation by making a ball of the nice soft package, while he kicked up the snow higher than ever.

"I'm glad we've got it over," said Tom, "and now I hope she'll be satisfied."

"Yes, I dare say she will," returned Charlotte, who thought the wish was uttered in good part. "Last time I am afraid she fancied we had wasted the money."

"Wasted it! I should like to know how she made that out. There was a knife and pop-gun for me, a book for Willy, a magnifying-glass for Frank, and some girls' things for you. And if that wasn't spending money well, I don't know what is!"

Charlotte was not quite so confident in the same view of the case. With the year of added gravity that had come to her since the receiving of that last half sovereign, she began to doubt whether it really had been expended very wisely, remembering with a little twinge of conscience one or two items among the "girls' things" which certainly might have been dispensed with.

"There was the bead pincushion," she said, "that came to pieces directly, and the embroidery silks. I've always regretted buying them."

"Oh, of course," returned Tom, "girls' things are always nonsense. I say, do you mind going home by Spring Lane?"

Spring Lane was rather dull, and a little out of the way, but as Tom had come so far with her, Charlotte thought it would be unkind to refuse.

"I want to look at old Purkiss's, you know," explained Tom.

He had looked at old Purkiss's often enough already, but the place had still as much interest for him as ever. It was a dull stone farm-house standing about midway down the lane, and looking on to it by one solitary window, very small and high up. But it was in that window that the chief attraction of the place was centred in Tom's estimation, for out of it had crept one dark night some years ago, when Tom was quite a baby, Farmer Purkiss's son, and he had never been heard of since. Of course, if he had come back the next week, or even the next year, Tom would not have cared to look at the window at all; but to stare at it now, and wonder how he had got down, and where he was, and whether he would ever be seen in Cumberstone again, was delightful.

"That's the one, you know, Charlotte," he said, pointing up to the high dark window when the old farm-house was reached.

He had given her that information so many times already, that it was quite unnecessary to repeat it; however, they both stood still, and looked up at the window as if they had never seen it before.

"I wonder he didn't get out at the door," said Charlotte; "it would have been so much easier."

"But it wouldn't have been the proper way," said Tom; "it's always the window; that's half the fun, you know."

But Charlotte said she could not see any fun in it either by door or window, an opinion that Tom was graciously pleased to excuse, in consideration of her being only a girl.

"That's because you don't understand it, Charlotte," he said. "I say, perhaps, he's come home! Let's go in and see."

There was not much likelihood of any such event having taken place; however, as Charlotte had a great respect for Mrs. Purkiss, she followed Tom very willingly into the wide farm-house kitchen.

The old lady was sitting by the fire with her knitting in her lap. She seemed old and bowed, a great change having passed over her at the time her son left home, driven away, it was said, by his father's harsh treatment. She knew exactly the question Tom had come to ask, and looked up at him with a grave shake of the head.

"No, Master Tom," she said, "not yet; I'm afraid we shall have to give him up."

"Oh, I don't know," answered Tom, "they've come back in books after ever so many years."

"But books isn't real life, Master Tom, and besides, even in them, you know, they don't always come back."

Tom could not deny that, as all the runaways he

had heard about the evening before had met with disastrous fates on the far-off sea ; however, he told her he should step in when he passed next time just to see ; and after taking a friendly leave of the old lady, and another look at the mysterious window, the children kept on their way down the lane.

Hetty was the only one when they reached home who showed the least interest in Charlotte's purchases, but when she had tried on the thimble, mittens, and gloves, and found that neither of those articles fitted her, she looked up in considerable bewilderment. To see Charlotte come home loaded with presents for no one but herself, was something so new in Hetty's experience that she could not in the least comprehend it.

"Isn't there anything for Tom or me?" she asked.

"No, dear ; I'm very sorry, but I couldn't help it. It is Aunt Janet's money that I have been spending, you know, not my own."

"And did she say you were to keep it all for yourself?"

"Yes ; but I hope to be able to save all this nice wool out of it, Hetty. There's enough to make a pair of stockings for poor John Barker, and perhaps some little ones for Johnny. And I shall make them if Aunt Janet will let me. I have written to ask her."

"You might as well have saved yourself the trouble," put in Willy, "for she won't, I can tell you."

But as it proved, Willy was wrong. A letter arrived from Miss Warne on the following morning, telling Charlotte to do as she pleased with the wool, and containing at the same time the less welcome intimation that they might expect to see her in the course of a few days.

"Expect her!" said Willy, as Charlotte came to a sudden pause in her reading. "Is Aunt Janet really coming, papa?"

"Yes, I believe so," replied Mr. Warne, looking provokingly contented at the prospect. "She thinks we can't get on without her."

"But we can," said Tom, "and Charlotte must write and tell her so."

"But that would not be very gracious, Tom, nor, perhaps, exactly true. There are one or two among us who might, I think, be the better for a little looking after."

Tom did not ask who the one or two were, for there was a grave look on his papa's face that made him feel rather uncomfortable. Only a few days before, Mr. Warne had put his hand on Tom's shoulder, and asked him if he were really trying to be a good boy, and as Tom could not answer the question satisfactorily, he had received a sorrowful rebuke that had been weighing a little on his conscience since, and led him to think at times that perhaps he ought to try to be better if it were only to make his papa happier.

"Only," he remarked in confidence to Charlotte, "it will be no use for Aunt Janet to

dream of keeping me in order, because she won't."

Charlotte was very sorry to hear that, and suggested the advisability of his taking himself in hand, and so relieving any one else of the necessity of doing it.

"Oh, I dare say," said Tom, "I don't see anything to complain of. I had all my lessons done and an extra copy before twelve o'clock yesterday."

"Yes, because you wanted to go out with Willy."

"And was hard at work all last half-holiday."

"Ah, but that was for being idle in the morning, Tom."

Charlotte's memory was provokingly good that day, and thinking it best not to try it any further, Tom returned to the obnoxious subject of Miss Warne's visit.

"It's too bad," he said, "not to let us alone, just as we're getting so comfortable, too."

"But I am not sure that we are, Tom, in every way. And besides, being comfortable isn't everything, you know."

"Oh, isn't it! Who likes to be miserable?"

"I don't know, I'm sure," returned Charlotte, feeling rather bewildered; "but I suppose we ought to be sometimes. It is not right to be happy when we've been doing wrong."

And as Tom told her, with a grimace, that he did not mean to be miserable under any circumstances, Charlotte thought that if Miss Warne

really did try to get Tom into better order, she should not mind her coming.

And then it occurred to her to wonder what there was to mind in it at all. Not certainly giving up her place as housekeeper, for that involved so many anxious responsibilities that Charlotte felt she should only be too glad to slip back again into her old position as papa's pupil, and Tom's and Hetty's teacher. Then, as she sat over her stocking-darning, she went over all she could recall of her Aunt Janet's visits to Cumberstone. First, there had been a great deal of nervous preparation; but then Charlotte reflected that her mamma had never been strong, and that the coming of visitors of any kind to the vicarage was an event of rare occurrence. Of Miss Warne herself Charlotte had no very clear impression. She had seen too few people, and felt too shy and awkward with strangers, to be a very good judge of character; but of all that concerned her externally, she could have given as clear a description as of some wax figure seen at Madame Tussaud's. Perhaps the force of contrast, and the uncomfortable impression of having always felt very rough and awkward by the side of Miss Warne, had deepened Charlotte's sense of her aunt's delicacy and primness. And then to think of having that tall pale lady, so many years older than papa, with her spotless cap, and rustling black silk dress, overlooking all the misdoings at the vicarage, was rather alarming. Charlotte remembered that during Miss Warne's short visits,

she had always been installed ceremoniously in the drawing-room, from which the small members of the household, to Tom's and Willy's great disgust, had been entirely excluded, and Charlotte wondered whether the same thing was to go on now. If it did, Miss Warne would be nicely out of everybody's way; but the using of an extra room in the winter time involved a little additional trouble and expense, which Charlotte, with all sorts of housekeeping cares weighing on her mind, felt would be a great drawback to the arrangement. Then she went across to the unused room, put its pretty ornaments in order, and was still deep in the important question as to whether it was to be Miss Warne's place of banishment, when her papa looked in, and asked her if she were expecting visitors.

"No, only Aunt Janet, papa."

"And she will hardly be a visitor this time, Charlotte." And as he thought of the different circumstances under which she had stayed with them before, Mr. Warne turned abruptly to the window, and stood for some minutes looking out in grave silence.

"And I was wondering," said Charlotte, when she saw that her papa could attend to her again, "whether Aunt Janet would like to have this room as she used to when——"

"When she was a visitor, Charlotte? No, I think not. We must not forget that she is coming now to help us, and if we shut her away here, I don't see very well how she is to do it."

"No, papa," returned Charlotte. But as she thought of her Aunt Janet's spotless cap and rustling silk, and the rough wants of their crowded household, she began to wonder what kind of help she would be able to give.

"I dare say we shall have some trouble to fit in to each other at first," said Mr. Warne, "but we must all do our best, and things will come right in time."

However, as he went away to his work in the study, Charlotte could not help thinking that she would rather they had all been left to go on in their own way.

But only Tom and Willy ventured to express that opinion plainly, and their remarks on the subject were chiefly confided to Charlotte, who, Tom thought, ought to feel herself specially aggrieved in having to give up her post as mistress of the household.

"But I wouldn't, if I were you, Charlotte," said Tom; "it's your right, and Aunt Janet has no business to come and interfere with you."

"Oh, Tom!" said Charlotte, "you know she means it for the best."

"Does she," said Tom; "oh, I dare say! And besides, what's that got to do with it?"

Charlotte replied that she did not know, and seemed to find the question altogether rather bewildering. Still she felt very sure that small Tom, who had not been able to tell her, the day before, whether Newcastle was on the Tyne or the Thames,



and had made sixteen mistakes in his dictation, had no business to criticise his elders so freely, and she tried to awaken him to a sense of his presumption. But it was no use. Tom had given everything up, his own improvement included, since he heard Miss Warne was coming, and he should not try to behave himself again, he said, till she was gone.

"And when will that be?" put in Willy. "It's my belief she's coming for good."

"No, she isn't," returned Tom; "that's the only bit of fun about it."

"About what, Tom? what do you mean?"

"Why, fighting it out, and seeing who's to win. But it won't be Aunt Janet; she'll have to give in and go."

"Oh, Tom, I hope you do not mean to behave improperly to her," said Charlotte. "You must not forget that she will be our visitor."

"But I shall," returned Tom; "because she won't be any more than old Stevens is when he comes round with his basket, and won't go away till we have bought something of him. Visitors are people who are asked, and she isn't."

Charlotte had an idea that people did come sometimes uninvited, and were still regarded as visitors, and treated accordingly; however, she knew that it was no use to argue the point with Tom, for he would be sure to silence her, and hold to his own view of the case firmer than ever. That proneness of Tom's to take up with wrong notions, and keep to them, was one of his most provoking

characteristics. If he chose to see a thing crooked no one could persuade him that it was straight; and Charlotte, especially during lesson time, was often sadly perplexed by his perversity. One day she had spoken of it to her papa, prefacing her remark, however, by saying that she had no complaint to make of Tom, as he was a very good boy on the whole, only there was no getting him to see things as she wished.

"That's a very common failing with people, I'm afraid," Mr. Warne had answered, smiling; "they won't take up our views of things if they seem ever so reasonable."

"But isn't it very tiresome of people, papa? I mean when they are young."

"Yes, very, Charlotte. But young or old, I suppose we must have patience with them."

So, from that time Charlotte had not vexed herself so much about Tom's blundering, hoping it would all come right some day. Troubles that might be mended by patience never seemed very terrible to her, as she had always a large stock of that on hand. And so she went back to her task of teaching Hetty that morning with the happy confidence that Tom's warlike demonstrations with respect to her Aunt Janet would come to nothing.

But later in the day Charlotte found that the spirit of revolt had spread further than the study. When she went into the kitchen to give the usual hour's lesson to Nancy, she found her sitting over the fire in her old listless way.



"It's no use, Miss Charlotte," said Nancy. "If what I've heard's true, I expect I shall have to go."

"If you mean Aunt Janet's coming, Nancy, I don't see what difference that will make. She is not likely to interfere with you."

"Oh, isn't she, Miss Charlotte? You'll see. If she's coming to be mistress here I don't see how she's to help it. I shall be very sorry to leave you and Master Tom, and Hetty, but if it comes to Miss Warne, you know, and interference, I must."

Charlotte did her best to soothe Nancy, but it was no use, and the books had to be put away that evening untouched.

And so things began to go on a little uncomfortably again in the Cumberstone household. Nancy went about her work as slowly and heavily as if she were carrying her great deal box on her shoulders, Willy was scolded for ill-prepared tasks, and as to Tom, he made no pretence of doing anything but grumble and get into mischief. Even little Hetty began to look frightened, and, not having a very clear recollection of her Aunt Janet, wanted to know if she were as bad as Mother Crabsticks used to be.

"Worse," replied Tom, "for Mother Crabsticks' birch is a fixture, and Janet's isn't."

Hetty did not exactly know what Tom meant by a fixture, but she gathered up a confused idea of something alarming being at hand, and Charlotte had to take her on her lap, and dry her tears

by the assurance that if she were a good girl, no one would ever wish to hurt her.

Charlotte's work altogether was rather hard that week. In addition to her usual duties, she had to prepare for Miss Warne's coming. There was Frank's room to be got ready for her, as he was to share Willy's bed; and Tom, who had enjoyed that privilege so far, was to shift elsewhere. Then she set her drawers and cupboards to rights, put patches and darns wherever they were wanted, and coaxed Nancy to do little extra bits of cleaning in the house, for there was nothing more likely, she thought, to shock her Aunt Janet than a ragged garment or a speck of dust.

"But it's no good, Miss Charlotte," was Nancy's expostulation, "clean or dirty, it'll be all one to Miss Warne. She's sure to see things wrong if they ain't."

"Then I'd leave them wrong if I were you, Nancy," said Tom, who happened unfortunately to be looking on. "A scolding is not half so bad to bear when you have earn't it."

"Oh, Tom, how can you say so!" said Charlotte; "it makes it a great deal worse."

"No, it doesn't; just you try next time, and you'll see what a difference there'll be. Do you think I'd have taken papa's shutting me up in the study so quietly the other day if I hadn't deserved it?"

Poor Tom! he was correct in thinking that when punishment is felt to be deserved, it is likely

to be borne more patiently, but there his ideas of right and wrong got entangled as usual, and he concluded that whenever there was a prospect of its coming, it was as well to anticipate it by a little superfluous naughtiness. Charlotte could not see the exact point at which Tom got wrong, so she contented herself with pointing out the extreme impropriety of his giving Nancy bad advice.

"Well, it won't make no difference, Miss Charlotte," said Nancy; and as she went off one way with an independent toss of the head, and Tom another, with his hands in his pockets, even Charlotte was reconciled for the moment to the thought of Miss Warne's coming to look after them all.

Then as she got deeper into the work of preparation, her heart began to fail her again. There was so much to be done, and no one to help her. Twice in the course of the week she had to go in to her papa with ill-prepared lessons—omissions that Tom thought would amply justify a little extra negligence on his part.

"But you haven't to get ready for Aunt Janet, Tom," was Charlotte's expostulation.

"Oh, haven't I! There's all my share of the cupboard to turn out, and take into your room."

"But can't you leave the things where they are? Frank would not mind it, I'm sure."

"Ah, but I should. I like to have them all handy. And, I say! you must come and show me where I'm to put them."

And so, in addition to her other work, Charlotte

had to dance attendance on Tom that afternoon, expostulate over the transit of a heap of rubbish into her neat little room, and finally consent to its being stowed away in a corner of her closet. But the tremendous upset that went on in both apartments while Tom was routing out his property, and claiming occasionally a great deal more than belonged to him, was something alarming to witness. Charlotte stood by, work in hand, while Tom dashed to and fro with his loads, and threw them down in the unlucky corner that had been assigned to him.

"Hadn't you better put them away a little tidily, Tom?" said Charlotte.

"No; what's the good, when I shall always be hunting them out?"

This was a terrible prospect, and half an hour after she had seen the corner filled, and, as she thought, done with, at least for the afternoon, Charlotte found half its contents spread on the floor again, and Tom rioting in the midst.

"Oh, Tom!" she said, "I thought you had done."

"So I had; but Willie says I've run off with his compasses, and so I'm obliged to look for them."

And presently Frank came in to inquire after some missing bit of his property; and while the contents of the corner underwent a fresh search, Charlotte stood by wondering how she should ever be able to keep a tidy room any more.

"I never thought of your bringing all those things with you, Tom," she said.

"Then you shouldn't have taken me in. I didn't want to come. I hate girls' rooms; they always make such a fuss about keeping them tidy. There, Frank, now I hope you are satisfied."

Frank said he supposed he must be, and he went away as Hetty trotted in to announce that tea was ready, but finding Tom's heap attractive, she sat down by the side of him to investigate.

"You won't keep me waiting, will you, Tom?" said Charlotte, "because I have so much to do."

Tom promised to be down directly, but neither he nor Hetty looked disposed to give up their entertainment. Punctuality had not been much practised in the household lately, especially when Mr. Warne was away, which was the case this afternoon; and so by the time Charlotte had cut a pile of bread and butter, and made the tea, there was no one to sit down with her to it but Frank.

"Would you mind telling the others that all is ready?" she said.

Frank shouted out an announcement to that effect at the door, and then came back to his book. Reading at meal-times was one of the bad habits that had crept upon him since he had been left, in such matters, very much to his own direction.

"Hadn't you better put your book away till we have finished tea, Frank?" said Charlotte.

"Why, it isn't in your way, is it?"

"No, only it hardly seems right to have it out now. I don't think anybody else would like it."

"Oh, you are thinking of Aunt Janet, I suppose," returned Frank, with an impatient shrug; "but if papa does not mind it, I don't see why she should."

"But papa does not notice half we do, Frank; he is so absent, you know; and it is not right that we should take advantage of that."

"I don't think I do. But I have a great deal of work to get through to-night," and Frank bent his face over his book again.

Then Tom came in with unwashed hands to pare down a piece of wood into a mast for his ship, while the process of bread and butter eating went on at the same time, and Willy followed with some kind of home-made apparatus that he called an electrifying machine, and from which he proceeded forthwith to elicit sparks that nobody could see but himself and Hetty. The week before Charlotte would have enjoyed all that was going forward immensely, and perhaps added to the general industry by some separate occupation of her own; but now, with the thought of Miss Warne's coming weighing on her mind, the case was different, and she could see nothing in the busy tea-table but its lamentable want of order.

"Oh, Tom," she said at last, "I am sure papa would not like such a mess if he were here."



"But he isn't, you see," said Tom, pertly. "I say, Willy, do you know where my boat is?"

Of course Willy did not, and Tom dashed off for a fresh hunt among the stores upstairs, leaving his tea unfinished.

"How tiresome Tom is!" said Charlotte; "he really deserves to lose it." And when the rest had at last done, she asked Willy, who was wandering about the room, to ring the bell for Nancy.

"But here's all Tom's bread and butter," said Hetty, who seemed half inclined to cry at the idea of Tom's losing it. "Won't you wait till he comes back?"

"No," returned Charlotte, "he ought not to have run away; but you may tell him, if you like, that his tea will be gone if he is not down directly."

Hetty ran off, but yielding again to the temptation of the treasure-cupboard, neither she nor Tom reappeared till after Nancy had cleared the table.

"Oh, dear," said Tom, "where's my tea gone? I hadn't half done."

"But you should not have left it," replied Charlotte, who was beginning to fear that perhaps she had been a little hard on Tom.

"Oh, shouldn't I," said Tom, "but never mind, I know where to find it;" and he marched off to finish his tea with Nancy.

This was not exactly what Charlotte had intended, but she did not know how she could prevent it. The question of manners had not been much attended to at the vicarage for some time past, and it seemed

too late to begin now. All through Mrs. Warne's long illness the children had been left very much to themselves, and it was scarcely surprising that they had grown a little wilful and disorderly. If Frank had only helped her, Charlotte reflected, by putting away his book when she asked him, and so setting a good example, things would not have been so bad that afternoon ; but he was too much engrossed in his studies to think of anything else. However, in all other respects he was so good and gentlemanly, that it was difficult to find any fault with him, and Charlotte would not have dreamed of doing it, or seeing anything wrong, perhaps, even about Tom, if the thought of Miss Warne's coming, and the possibility of her not approving of all that went forward, had not been pressing very heavily on her mind.

CHAPTER IV.

Among the letters on the breakfast table, the next morning, was one in Miss Warne's writing, and Tom took it up and examined it with rather a forlorn aspect.

"It's to say when she's coming, I expect," he said, "and we shall have to look out."

He did not explain in what way, for his papa just then entered the room, and Tom settled himself down to the table with as much regard to order as he thought necessary. Then the letters were read, and Tom had the satisfaction of hearing that his surmise with respect to the contents of Miss Warne's letter was correct, and that she might be expected by an afternoon train the next day.

"And I hope you will behave yourselves, boys," said Mr. Warne; "I am afraid we have all been getting a sadly disorderly crew lately. Tom, what's that you're scraping at?"

Only some ornamental part of his ship, Tom explained; but at his papa's request, he put it aside and gave his attention to his bread and butter.

"As a general rule," said Mr. Warne, "I think

one thing at a time is as much as we can manage, and I hope you will try and remember that for the future, Tom, without any further reminder from me, for I am often too busy to notice what you are doing."

Frank profited by this remark to thrust a book he was reading under the table, and with the exception of a sudden outcry from Hetty, when Tom, who could not use his fingers as he pleased, took to kicking her under the table, the meal went forward in a way that would have satisfied, Charlotte thought, even Aunt Janet. Then Mr. Warne sent the boys to their work in the study, and sat for a few minutes in grave thought by the fireside.

"Shall you mind giving up your post, Charlotte?" he asked at last.

"No, papa, for some things I shall be very glad."

"Yes, I am afraid it has been too heavy for you. And the boys seem to be getting tiresome."

"Not Frank, papa, he is always a help to me, and Willy and Tom try to be good sometimes."

"Sometimes!" repeated Mr. Warne, "I am afraid that is not saying much for them; but they have had a great loss, poor boys." And he sat for a minute or two again silently shading his face with his hand—an action that had become habitual to him since his wife's death. Charlotte stood by, looking quietly on, her own sorrowful thoughts a little disturbed by grave questions on household matters.

"Did Aunt Janet say exactly when she would be here, papa?"



"Yes, you must have a nice tea ready at the usual time. And I suppose the boys had better have a holiday, for I have a great deal to do in the village this morning, and must meet your aunt at Stopford in the afternoon."

"And is Tom to have a holiday too, papa?" asked Charlotte, for Tom was her pupil.

"Yes, I suppose so. You would hardly get much work out of him, I am afraid, while the others were at play."

Which was quite true, Charlotte knew. And, as it happened, Tom was the only one who cared to avail himself of the indulgence. Frank was too busy, he said; and Willy, who often liked to copy Frank's proceedings, chose to bear him company. So Tom, being left to enjoy himself alone, and having besides the additional grievance of owing his half-holiday to Miss Warne's coming, was not in the best of humours.

"Hadn't you better do something?" said Charlotte, as Tom loitered about in hopeless idleness.

"No, for if I did it would only be something bad," replied Tom; in which case Charlotte agreed with him that idleness was the safest course.

And Nancy was scarcely more creditably disposed. She had never had such a fit of obstinacy on her before in Charlotte's recollection, and talked rather threateningly of the kitchen-maid's place being vacant at Fairlawn, and the delights of holding service there.

"But you are not thinking of leaving us, I

hope?" said Charlotte, who liked old faces best, even if they did not look pleasant at all times.

"Well, I don't know, miss. When there's a new missis, it's best, I fancy, to have a new maid." And then Charlotte had the further vexation of hearing Tom, who was, of course, close at hand, lament the impossibility of taking himself off at the same time. It was very dreadful, she thought, for people to mind being looked after so much, and grave fears as to Nancy's and Tom's wellbeing in a moral point of view mingled with her other anxieties that day.

"You must let Aunt Janet have a nice tea," Mr. Warne had said; and when dinner was over, and her papa had gone out again, Charlotte, who had not much faith in her own resources, regretted that she had not asked him for further directions.

"I wonder what we had better get?" she said to Nancy; but it was no use to look for help in that quarter.

"Oh, a cake with lots of plums in it," said Tom, rather brightening under the idea. "That's the best thing!"

"But not when you have come off a journey, Tom," said Charlotte, who was thinking of some special delicacy for Miss Warne's sole benefit. "And besides, there would not be time for it now."

"Then make them small—one all round; and we can cut them open and butter them."

That sounded promising, but Tom had only his

own regalement in view, Charlotte was afraid, and she looked undecided.

"Do you remember what we had when aunt came before?" she asked of Nancy.

"Lor, no, miss; who's to carry a tea in her head for near upon a twelvemonth?"

"There were some eggs, I know," pursued Charlotte, "and something under a cover, but I forget what that was."

"Aunt Janet's box, perhaps," suggested Tom. "I recollect she'd done it up in brown holland. Then you're not going to have any cakes?"

"Oh yes, I'll make some plain ones, Tom, because papa likes them; and perhaps Aunt Janet may too. And there shall be one for you, if you will only promise to be good."

"And for Willy too, or he'll want half of mine," said Tom.

"Very well. And I think," said Charlotte, still intent on the difficulty of the covered dish, "it must have been ham; don't you, Nancy?"

But Nancy was not going to give any opinion in the matter, and Charlotte proceeded to sum up the bill of fare with great deliberation.

"Ham and eggs, and hot cake—that sounds like a nice tea. But I wish papa had told me what I had better get."

However, to have settled on something was a relief, and Charlotte set about making the cakes forthwith; Nancy, of course, not condescending to have anything to do with them. Tom still hung

about looking on, though his interest in the cakes was considerably cooled since it had been decided that there were to be no plums in them.

"I shall have more time for your lessons, Tom," said Charlotte, "when Aunt Janet comes."

"Oh, I dare say," said Tom, who could hardly be expected to feel much satisfaction at that prospect.

"And I hope you will try to behave properly to her. You know papa says it is very kind of her to come and look after us."

"Oh, is it? It would be a great deal kinder to let us alone."

"No, it would not, Tom. It is not good for people to be let alone too much; they get so fond of having their own way."

"Well, what does it matter, if it's a good way?"

"But sometimes it isn't, and then it is best they shouldn't have it. And I am afraid that has been the case with some of us lately, especially with you, Tom. You have not been quite so good, you know, since——" And the tears came into Charlotte's eyes; but crying was inconvenient when she had not a hand at liberty, and so, greatly to Tom's relief, she was obliged to change the subject.

"There, now I think there's dough enough for eight cakes, and that will be one apiece. I wonder if the oven is ready for them."

Tom thought it was, but Charlotte could not quite trust to his judgment, or even her own, on



that matter, as preparing the oven was always Nancy's share of any baking operation that might be going forward. But she was not to be found, just then, anywhere on the premises, and Tom gave it as his opinion that she was off after the vacant place at Fairlawn.

"Oh dear, it's too bad of her," said Charlotte. "I don't know what we shall do."

"Why, make them up, of course," said Tom, who was thinking of the cakes, "and I'll mind them."

This was accordingly done; and, at the first peep into the oven, they were found to be plumping up so satisfactorily that Tom declared they had been put in exactly at the right moment. But there were other things to be thought of besides the cakes—boiled eggs, and that important covered dish, the fried ham; and over the difficulties offered by the preparation of this last piece of cookery poor Charlotte was almost ready to cry.

"Oh, what's the matter?" said Tom, who found burning his face at the oven rather freshening to his energies.

"Why, the ham, Tom; I shall never know when it is done."

"Oh yes, you will; let's taste it, that will be the way, and then we can't make a mistake."

Charlotte wondered that simple expedient had not occurred to her; and thought, as she put the slices into the pan, what a comfort Tom would be to her if he would always use his wits to such good,

peaceful ends. Then, as Tom declared himself equal to taking charge of both ham and cakes at the same time, Charlotte went into the parlour to set the tea. It really was, as Charlotte had said, too bad of Nancy to desert her post at such a critical time; but, as the clock struck five, she re-appeared, still looking sullen and defiant, at the kitchen door.

"Well," said Tom, who was turning the ham, "have you got it?"

"Got what?" asked Nancy.

"Why, the place at Fairlawn. We thought you'd gone after it."

Nancy threw down her bonnet without answering, and took the fork out of Tom's hand.

"That isn't your work, Master Tom," she said.

"No," replied Tom, taking another look into the oven, "no more is this, but if you go off, you know, what is to be done?"

Nancy did not explain; but she turned the ham far oftener than Tom thought necessary, and intimated, with something like a sob, that she had not expected Tom to change sides.

"And who says I have?" asked Tom.

"Why, seeing you do all this, Master Tom; I shouldn't have thought you'd have cared how things was."

But in the cooking way Tom explained that he did; and, having ascertained that the cakes had attained a state of dainty brownness, he proceeded

to draw them, and consult Nancy on the advisability of buttering them without loss of time.

"Perhaps you'd best wait till she comes," returned Nancy.

This referred, of course, to Miss Warne, and Tom turned away with his hands in his pockets. In the zest of preparation he had almost forgotten that the expected company was not quite to his taste, and now his thoughts went back to that fact, and grew rather bitter in consequence.

"Well, you may finish them if you like," he said, "I don't care." And when Charlotte came in, and was moved by the sight of the cakes to thank Tom for the help he had been to her, he told her surlily that he had only done it to please himself.

"But that is one of the reasons that makes us kind to each other," said Charlotte, who wished, as usual, to see the best of things. "And now you will wash your hands, Tom, won't you?"

Tom did not see that he need hurry himself about that, though they were dreadfully black; and he marched off into the study, where the other two boys were still hard over their work.

"A pretty holiday it has been, altogether," he remarked; however, in the midst of his misery he could not forget that there were hot cakes for tea, and presently found his way back to the kitchen to see how they were going on. Nancy was crying by that time, a sorrowful remonstrance from Charlotte having brought her to contrition; but all signs of

it disappeared with the first sound of carriage wheels on the hard road, and Charlotte knew that she must again depend upon herself. It was rather hard; but, as she went forward nervously to meet her aunt, Charlotte tried to remember that she was coming, as her papa had said, to be a help to her. Nancy, however, did condescend so far as to open the door, and outside in the gloom Charlotte saw a lady superintending, apparently with great concern, the transit of her box from the top of the fly.

"It's the covered one," whispered Tom, who was at Charlotte's elbow; "isn't she fond of it?"

Charlotte feared she must be, or she would not have been so long in coming in; however, she was rather shaken in that opinion when the box was, at last, safely landed in the passage, and she caught a glimpse of her aunt's face. It was very grave and tearful, and precious as the box might have been, Charlotte hardly thought its welfare could have been sufficiently dear to call for such tender signs of solicitude as that.

But perhaps it was as well that Miss Warne's eyes were a little misty on the evening of her arrival at the vicarage, for, except the tea and bright room, there was nothing particularly pleasant for them to see. Charlotte was too timid to volunteer much in the way of welcome, and the boys too ill-tempered. Even little Hetty shrank back with a frightened face when her aunt stooped to kiss her; and Miss Warne, straightening herself a little



more than usual, thought, perhaps, that kindly greetings were unknown things at the vicarage. Mr. Warne saw something was wrong, but with Nancy sulky and blundering, Charlotte nervous, Hetty on the verge of a good cry, and each of the boys showing symptoms more or less of hostility, it was difficult to fix on the real culprit; and so he fell back on the substantial comforts of the nice tea to restore everybody's good humour. But even the eight cakes, light and tempting as they were, failed to do that. Tom ate his, displaying as he did so a pair of hands that must greatly have shocked Miss Warne, but did not seem any better in consequence. Unfortunately he was seated next to Hetty, and contrived to make himself such an unpleasant neighbour that the good cry, which had been threatening ever since Miss Warne's arrival, came on with a sudden outbreak that startled everybody, and she had to be led away under Charlotte's charge.

"You see we are not a pattern party, Janet," said Mr. Warne.

"No, I dare say not," replied Miss Warne, looking absently at Tom's hands; and the vicar, happening to glance in the same direction, ordered Tom off to wash them. Of course he went very reluctantly. He had blacked his hands cooking their tea, he said to himself as he mounted the stairs, and he would take care to let it alone another time; and then he groped his way into the dark room where Charlotte was trying to soothe Hetty's sobs.

"Who is that?" asked Charlotte.

"Why, me," replied Tom, who was not always very particular about his grammar. "I'm ordered off too, and presently there'll be somebody else."

"Oh, I hope not. What have you been doing?"

"Why, getting the tea." But, as there was a furious splash at the hand-basin the next minute, Charlotte guessed directly how he had offended.

"Ah, you ought to have washed them before tea, Tom," she said. "I don't know what Aunt Janet will think of us."

But that was a point on which Tom was entirely indifferent. He splashed on till he thought all traces of his afternoon's occupation had disappeared, and then told Charlotte he should sit in the study for the rest of the evening.

"But I am afraid the fire is out, Tom; it looked all dark as I passed it."

"Then I can go to bed, or anything, I don't care!"

And Hetty's sobs being hushed, Charlotte had to leave him, and go back to the dining-room. Tea was over by that time, and Miss Warne seated in an easy-chair by the fire.

"Will you come and speak to me now?" she said, holding out a hand to Hetty.

"No," returned Hetty, sturdily; and Charlotte had to explain that she was afraid the little girl had been made too much of lately.

"Yes, done as she pleased, like the rest of us,"

said Mr. Warne. "I am afraid you will find it a hard matter to keep us in order, Janet." And then they began to talk of other things, and the children, sitting shyly aside, felt, for the first time in their lives, as if they were shut out of the home circle.

But it would not always be so, Charlotte thought, as she toiled upstairs again a little later with Hetty half asleep in her arms. She would soon be old and steady enough to be papa's house-keeper all by herself, or they should get used to Aunt Janet; and she turned into her own room to gladden Tom's eyes with a light, and the pleasant view she was trying to take of things.

But he had wound himself up to too desperate a pitch of wretchedness to be easily comforted. He had gone certainly to the little bed that had been made up for him beside Charlotte's, but looked out of that snug retreat with such a forlorn aspect, that at sight of him Hetty's sleepy fit passed off, and a crying one came on instead.

"Oh, Tom," said Charlotte, intent on the comfort she had meant to give, "I don't think things will be so bad by and by."

"By and by!" repeated Tom, wrathfully. "Who cares for that?"

"Oh, I do, Tom," said Charlotte, "and so does everybody who—who tries to be good, and hopes at last to be where mamma is."

She had not thought of directing Tom's attention to such a far off "by and by" as that, but

somehow Hetty's tears were infectious, and Charlotte, in her trouble, did not care to think of any other.

"And then," she continued, as she dried her eyes again, "we shall be used to Aunt Janet long before that time comes, I hope, Tom, or I shall be papa's housekeeper again—only a better one, you know, and able to manage everything."

"Oh, you're good enough for us," said Tom; "we were satisfied, and so was papa."

"I don't think he was, Tom, or perhaps Aunt Janet would not have come. You haven't been so nice lately as you used to be, you know, nor Willy; and I have not been able to make you any better."

"No, of course not. Who wanted you to?"

"Oh, papa did, I am sure; but if I had been older, I dare say it would not all have happened."

"What wouldn't have happened?" asked Tom, surlily.

"Why, your giving up trying to be good. It's such a dreadful thing to do that!"

In his inmost heart Tom knew that it was, but he did not feel disposed to allow it just then, or, at all events, to own that such culpability could in any way attach to him. Charlotte was too busy to press the matter on him, for Hetty was getting sleepy again, and making the process of being undressed as unpleasant as possible to herself and her nurse. But it was over at last, and then Charlotte gave Tom a kiss, and said she hoped he

would try to go to sleep, and to think of his mamma's letter.

"But I don't see how I am to do both at the same time," said Tom. And as Charlotte reflected that she had not put her advice in the most impressive form possible, she regretted again her inability to cope with Tom's naughtiness.

CHAPTER V.

It happened, perhaps a little unfortunately, that Miss Warne took up her new charge as housekeeper at the vicarage for the first time on a Sunday, when domestic disorder is apt to show itself more than on other days. She was down early, and looked rather a striking contrast in her trim cap and shining silk dress to the slovenly maid, and not very neatly arranged breakfast table. Tom's sharp eyes detected the wide difference between them instantly, and resented it as he did every other little untoward circumstance connected with their visitor, over which she could hardly be suspected of having any control. But then she had looked up at him a little inquiringly as he entered the room, and evidently noticed a tuft of hair on his forehead, which he knew he ought to have submitted to Charlotte's care before coming down, but would not, and so now it was erecting itself in unseemly fashion, and evidently offending Miss Warne's order-loving eyes. However, happily, breakfast was rather a hurried meal at the vicarage. School began at nine, at which every one, even including little Hetty, had to



be present ; and there was soon a general rush from the table, and Tom, as he put on his cap, gave a pull at the ambitious tuft that was almost vigorous enough to root it entirely out. Then Charlotte and Hetty came down hand in hand and had to submit to Miss Warne's grave inspection as they passed the dining-room door.

"I should not have thought there was any class sufficiently advanced for you to be in," she said.

"Oh no, aunt," replied Charlotte, blushing, "I have one of my own."

"But only of very young children, I hope."

"No, aunt, some of them are quite little—not bigger than Hetty."

Miss Warne seemed rather relieved by that assurance, but Charlotte felt conscious that she was not quite satisfied. And with the shadow of her aunt's doubt upon her, everything afterwards seemed to go wrong. How could she attempt to teach others, she thought, when she had not been able, the night before, to set even Tom right on any point. And so one by one her little scholars, including Hetty, grew disorderly ; and Tom, in Farmer Purkiss's class opposite, with his tuft bolt upright, and eyes on the alert, was evidently enjoying her discomfiture. But even then it would not have been so bad if Miss Warne had not come in towards the close of the teaching, and posted herself by the side of Charlotte's chair. There was an instant hush of good behaviour in the class, but

that perhaps only brought forward the teacher's incompetency more prominently, and as they rose at last to sing the parting hymn, more than one tear dropped on poor Charlotte's open book.

Going home Mr. Warne joined them, and Charlotte was glad to nestle up close to his side.

"What is the matter," he asked; "have your children been tiresome?"

"Yes, papa," replied Charlotte, with brimming eyes, "but perhaps it was not altogether their fault."

"No, I am afraid they are rather more than she can manage," said Miss Warne.

"Not in a general way, I think. Perhaps your being there frightened her, Janet."

"But I only came in towards the close, and was an assistance, I think, in the way of keeping order."

"Yes, you awed the class, I saw, and the teacher too, perhaps, at the same time. I am not quite sure that I got on so well after you came in, and stood looking on in grave rebuke of our proceedings."

"But why? I dare say I find it quite as difficult to do things well as other people."

"But you don't give them the comfort of seeing it. Some folks seem equal to anything, and that makes the blunderers only more conscious of their own shortcomings."

"I hope you are not laughing at me," said Miss Warne, gravely.

"Do I ever laugh at any one?"

"No, I don't know that you mean to." But then such a troubled look came into Miss Warne's quiet face that Charlotte thought perhaps she did find it difficult to do right sometimes, and was grieved at it, which was a comforting view of her Aunt Janet that she would have been glad to take up if she could.

But the troubles of the day were not yet over. On starting for church Miss Warne found that Hetty was not in the party, and asked if she had gone on with her papa.

"No, we don't take her with us yet," said Charlotte, blushing again, she scarcely knew why.

"Not take her! But I think she is four years old."

"Yes; she always goes to the school, and then she used to say her hymns and verses to mamma."

"But mamma is not here now, you know, to see to her, and I think it is wrong to leave her behind. Will you go and fetch her, Charlotte, and we will wait for you here?"

Charlotte went, and to her great horror found Hetty in absorbed contemplation of Tom's treasure heap.

"Oh, Hetty," said Charlotte, "you forget it is Sunday!"

"No, I don't. I've been to the school," and Hetty evidently thought the Sunday duties, so far as she was concerned, were satisfactorily fulfilled.

"But now you are to go to church—Aunt Janet says so."

Hetty did not object. It was something fresh, and she allowed Charlotte to shut the treasures out of sight without a murmur. Then her hat and little cloth mantle were put on again, but her gloves were nowhere to be found.

"I suppose we must go without them," said Charlotte, as the five minute bell began to ring; "but I am afraid Aunt Janet will think you look dreadfully untidy."

And of course she did, but it could not be helped; and so the party started, Hetty being told to keep her little red hands as much out of sight as possible.

But going across the vicarage garden into the churchyard, Charlotte was visited with grave fears as to how Hetty might behave. She had been very naughty at the school that morning, and after such a bad beginning it was no use, Charlotte knew, to expect anything very satisfactory.

"You'll sit quite quiet, won't you, Hetty?" she said; "people never speak or look about at church."

"Then I don't want to go."

"But you must, Hetty dear, because you are getting a great girl now, and ought to learn to do what is right."

Hetty was so awed by this sudden view of her duties, that she thought regretfully of the attractive heap she had left at home, and wanted to go back; but a donkey happened to have strayed into the

churchyard, and Tom rushing off just then in mad pursuit of it, Hetty's attention was so pleasantly diverted that she found herself perched on a high bench inside the church before it occurred to her that she had changed her mind as to the advisability of going there at all that day. And her next objection, expressed more audibly than was quite proper, was to sitting next Miss Warne; but Charlotte had to go to her place at the harmonium—a little instrument close to Mr. Warne's reading-desk—and so Hetty remained patiently on her high perch till she saw her papa emerge from the vestry, when she scampered off to meet him, and had to be captured and brought back by Frank. There was a little calm in the vicarage pew after that, and Charlotte tried to attend to the service, and take as much pleasure as usual in going through the sweet old psalms and chants, but she could not help feeling that her aunt's bonnet was turned in her direction whenever she stood up to sing, and it made her playing a little unsteady. But then, when the playing and singing were over, there was her papa's sermon to listen to—a comforting one about the Christian's service—doing “as to the Lord, and not unto men;” and Charlotte thought what a good thing it was that the Master she loved and wished to serve would never be angry with her, though she was so foolish, and made such sad blunders in her little round of daily duties.

But in the vicarage pew the hearers were not so attentive. Frank, who had been reading some

grand orations in the preceding week, was disposed to be critical, and the other two boys made no pretence to attend. And so when they all met again in the church porch, Charlotte's face was the only one that looked quieted by the morning service, and her aunt's eyes lingered on it for the first time with something like satisfaction.

"I did not know you played," she said; "it was very pleasant to hear your nice old psalm tunes."

"Yes, when they didn't go wrong," said Tom. "What a shaky fit you'd got."

"But I think she did her best," said Miss Warne, gravely; "we must not forget what your papa has just been telling us in his sermon."

And Charlotte, remembering what her aunt had said that morning about finding it difficult to do well, thought that perhaps she had taken comfort from the sermon too, and that so they might have had something in common.

And with that feeling to cheer her, the walk home through the churchyard was the pleasantest part of the day to Charlotte. The donkey was gone, and Tom, seeing nothing attractive elsewhere, kept on in tolerable order at Hetty's side. At the gate they were joined by Mr. Warne, who took Hetty up in his arms, and told her he had been very glad to see her at church, but that, when there, she must always remember to keep to her pew for the future, and not think of joining him in the reading-desk, as he reserved that pulpit entirely for himself. Hetty thought her unkind; however, she promised to bear



it in mind, and try to behave better on the following Sunday.

"And what can you tell me of the sermon?" asked Mr. Warne.

Hetty had to confess that she had been asleep during the greater part of it, but said that she had no doubt Tom could tell him all about it.

"I don't think he can," replied Mr. Warne. "Tom does not like sermons; they make him feel uncomfortable."

"Do they—why?"

"Because they tell him to go one way, and Tom has made up his mind to go another."

"But does it matter?" asked Hetty.

"Yes, I am afraid that it does very much," replied Mr. Warne, gravely; "because they do not both lead to the same end. But I hope Tom will consider that before long, and take the right course."

And so it happened, that to Tom the walk across the churchyard did not seem so pleasant as it was to Charlotte. "It was too bad," he remarked some time afterwards, "to have people always at you. He had had more than an hour of old Purkiss that morning, and thought that quite enough without anything else."

"And why," continued Tom, who was apt when cross to dart about from one grievance to another, "he should come and teach at the school when he couldn't keep Joe in order I don't know!"

"Perhaps it is because he wishes to do right,"

said Charlotte, who, being still intent on the sermon, was disposed to take a charitable view of people's motives.

"Oh, is it! It's because there has been nobody for him to use his stick upon at home, since Joe went off, and so he brings it to the school. And that's how he manages to teach," pursued Tom, in reference, perhaps, to the stick. "I could if I'd got one, and so might any one else!" And Charlotte seeing how Tom was at war with all the world, as usual, felt very glad that her papa was hopeful about his getting on the right road some day.

But in the meantime, Tom was very trying. He took himself out of reach altogether of Farmer Purkiss and his stick in the afternoon, and then re-appeared at tea as though nothing were amiss. Of course everybody knew that Tom had not been at the school, and Miss Warne asked him gravely what he had been doing.

"Looking after Sarah Bankes's donkey," was the reply.

"But was that a proper occupation for Sunday afternoon?"

"Yes, if she'd lost it," replied Tom.

"But suppose I had joined in the chase, Tom," said Mr. Warne; "do you think that would have been right?"

"No, papa, you had to preach."

"And you had to join your class at the school."

"But that did not matter so much, papa."

"It mattered in this way, Tom, that it was clearly

as much your duty to be there as mine to be in the pulpit; and I cannot see that you have any more right to shirk your work than I have mine."

"But it does not do one any good to sit and listen to old Purkiss."

"And donkey-chasing was hardly likely to prove a more profitable occupation. But I think, Tom, that if we avail ourselves heartily of our opportunities of improvement as they come, we shall get good from them, whether our teachers are what they ought to be or not. And what was Farmer Purkiss's subject this morning?"

Tom replied that he could not say, and when Mr. Warne looked gravely at him, added that he did not think old Purkiss knew himself.

"But he had a verse as usual, I suppose?"

"Oh yes," replied Tom, but it was evident that he did not want to give it.

"And what was it?"

"'The ear that heareth the reproof of life abideth among the wise.'"

"Ah," said Mr. Warne, gravely, "I think that was sermon enough of itself, Tom, if you had been willing to attend to it. Did you ever seriously ask yourself what was meant by the 'hearing ear'?"

No, Tom did not know that he had. It was his misfortune to be more ready in a general way with his tongue than his ears; and perhaps his conscience told him so as he sat stirring his tea a little uncomfortably.

"Then perhaps Hetty can tell us. Hetty, what do you do when I call you?"

"I come to you, papa," replied Hetty, further illustrating the subject by perching herself on Mr. Warne's knee.

"Exactly; and when you are there, in a nice position for hearing what I have to say to you, what else shall I expect you to do?"

"To listen, papa."

"Yes; then 'the hearing ear' implies a readiness to receive the Word, and patient attention to profit by it. And I am afraid, Tom, that you have failed in both points to-day."

But Tom could not see that it mattered, while old Purkiss was the expositor of the lesson, a view of the case that Mr. Warne, of course, would not take up. As long as Tom was in Farmer Purkiss's class, he said, it was his duty to give him his respectful attention without troubling himself as to the style of his teaching; and Tom, not being ready with any further objection, finished his tea in silence.

Then the bells rang out again, and the little party, with the exception of Hetty, crossed the vicarage garden and graveyard once more to the dimly-lighted church, where the last service, perhaps because it was the simplest, always seemed the pleasantest. There were more old people then, Charlotte always fancied, than at the morning service, though many of them had infirmities that might well have kept them at their own firesides in



the dark winter evenings. But they liked to go best, they explained, when they were sure of understanding, and Mr. Warne always talked to them at the closing service of the day, just as he did in their own homes. That evening the text was the one learnt in Farmer Purkiss's class in the morning, and Tom could not say the same of his papa's treatment of it as he had of the old farmer's. Charlotte, sitting at her harmonium and listening with moistened eyes, hoped that Tom was attending, and that what his papa said would do him good. But Tom had had enough of that text already, he thought, and felt rather aggrieved at having it brought before him again. So he let his attention wander to other matters—to the events of the past week, and the probabilities of the one he had just entered on. Tom's way of listening to a sermon was not peculiar to himself. Here and there in the little congregation were, no doubt, some following precisely the same plan. One old man near Charlotte kept nodding off, but each time as she roused him up, he thanked her with a smiling face, and did his best to keep awake. He would have listened if he could, Charlotte knew, and there was less to fear for him than for Tom and other lively folks about the church, whose senses were all on the alert, but used, just then, to no good purpose.

"It was a nice sermon," whispered the old man to Charlotte after the parting benediction had been given; "a blessed sermon!" and he went away with the comfort of it in his heart if he had nothing else.

After him down the aisle marched Tom and Willy, two sharp lads, who thought it was fine fun to play tricks on their sleepy neighbour, poor old Giles, and never reflected that he might be nearer the attainment of that abiding inheritance among the wise of which they had just been hearing.

CHAPTER VI.

WITH Monday morning came fresh duties, and Miss Warne, who had not located herself at Cumberstone with any intention of being idle, paid a solemn visit of inspection to most of the drawers and cupboards in the house: a great liberty, Tom thought, who was aware that his stores were not in the most orderly condition, and rather resented their being peered into. And of course there were odd corners here and there that shocked Miss Warne excessively, especially in the boys' room—that is, the one tenanted by Frank and Willy—where it seemed as if any amount of painstaking clearing would be thrown away.

“My dear,” she said to Charlotte, who was following her with an anxious heart, “cannot they be persuaded to keep their things in better order?”

“No, aunt, I am afraid not.” And then she added, thinking that fact might account for many of their misdoings, “You see they are only boys.”

“No, but I suppose boys may be made tidy as well as other people. We must see what can be done.”

And unfortunately the work of reformation was destined to begin in the cupboard which contained Tom's treasures.

"Tom," said Miss Warne, in the course of the day, "you must put all that litter of your's straight that is in Charlotte's room. Haven't you a box to keep it in?"

"No," Tom replied, "he had not, and he did not like boxes, for whatever you wanted was sure to be at the bottom."

Miss Warne did not see that, though having travelled a great deal, she had had a long experience of them in her life; however, whether he liked to put it elsewhere or not, the rubbish had to be arranged in a more presentable form, and Tom, at last, planted himself in front of it to see what could be done.

"Well, if you like to give me half the cupboard," he said at last to Charlotte, "I can manage it easily enough."

"But I cannot, Tom. You see I have no room for my things as it is; they have been so crushed up since I gave you that corner. Aunt Janet was quite distressed at the sight of the cupboard altogether."

"I dare say she was! I wonder how she would like me to go prying into her box, and telling her that wanted setting to rights!"

"But it doesn't, Tom. Aunt Janet is so very tidy."

"Oh yes, according to her notion; but I might

not like her way of keeping things any more than she does mine ! ”

Charlotte could not dispute that, as Tom’s ideas with respect to order were rather peculiar ; but seeing that he was still staring hopelessly at his heap, she suggested, as the best means of getting over the difficulty, that he should throw away everything he did not want.

“ And I should like you to tell me what that is ! ” said Tom.

Charlotte did her best to oblige, but happened, in Tom’s opinion, to pick out the most valuable articles in the collection.

“ Nasty stones ! ” he repeated indignantly. “ You should have seen the trouble they gave me to collect ; and the clay is for modelling, and the peas for my pop-gun. Much you know about things ! ”

And Charlotte thought, at last, it would be best to leave Tom to manage his affairs himself. Besides, on Monday afternoon she had particular business of her own to attend to—her “ parish business ” the boys always called it, and as she thought of it in that light, she wondered whether her aunt would approve of it.

“ If I were you,” said Tom, “ I’d go without letting her know.”

“ But I can’t, Tom ; it would not be right.”

“ Then she’ll stop it, that’s all.”

Charlotte did not think that unlikely. Her aunt had appeared half disposed to object to the class the day before, and of course this “ parish

business" would seem still more unfitted for her; and so, very humbly, she looked into the dining-room to tell Miss Warne she was going out.

"But not alone, of course," she replied; "I hope you never think of doing that."

"Oh, only sometimes, aunt, when the boys would be in the way."

"In the way!" repeated Miss Warne, looking rather puzzled.

"Yes; they would make fun of poor old Giles and Nauny Sparks, aunt."

But still Miss Warne was quite at a loss to understand what Charlotte meant, and so she had to explain that on Monday afternoons she always hunted up truant Sunday scholars, and shouted portions of the sermons of the previous day into the ears of one or two deaf old people who had not been able to hear them for themselves.

"But if you think I had better not, aunt," continued Charlotte, "I'll give it up, only they will all be very sorry not to see me."

Miss Warne did not answer for a minute, but looked at Charlotte with grave, troubled eyes.

"You are very young," she said, "to take such work up."

"Yes, aunt; but you see there is no one else to do it."

"There is papa, and I don't suppose he neglects any one."

"Oh, no, aunt, only they never mind me, and indeed I do my best."

"I dare say you do, Charlotte. I was not thinking of that."

Charlotte did not know what other obstacle there could be in the way. Her own incapacity, a matter about which she had been more than ever troubled since her aunt's coming, being the only one that she knew of.

"And papa is so busy," pleaded Charlotte, "that he says he is glad of anybody's help, even if it is not good for much."

"Then I ought to give mine," returned Miss Warne. "Suppose you leave these old people to me, Charlotte, and I will see if I can attend to them."

"But I am afraid you would not like it, aunt—at least not going to old Nanny Sparks. She gets so very cross, sometimes, when I'm not able to make her hear, only I am used to her, and don't mind it."

"Well, I think the best way will be for me to go with you to-day just to see." And, greatly to Charlotte's dismay, her aunt put away her work and went upstairs to prepare for the expedition.

That was worse than anything Charlotte had expected. Of course it was very kind of Aunt Janet, she thought, and no doubt she did it for the best, but she was sadly afraid that she should not be able to get through her work very well with such a precise looker-on, and expected that the poor people would find her a little in the way too.

And, as she was a perfect stranger to them, of course they did. It happened that Nanny Sparks' cottage came first, and the presence of Miss Warne's trim upright figure in it so bewildered her that she grew deafer than ever.

"What's that?" she asked, as Charlotte repeated in a high key the text of the evening sermon, "Hearing ears! of course I haven't got 'em, but that's no fault of mine."

"I did not mean that," screamed poor Charlotte; and she took out her Bible, thinking that if she read the text from that, old Nanny would see she did not intend anything insulting.

"Well," said Nanny, looking satisfied at last, "what next—what did he say about it?"

And Charlotte, feeling that her difficulties were just beginning, shouted into the old woman's ears the first division of the sermon; but of course Nanny heard it all wrong, and Charlotte had to repeat it till she did not feel quite sure that she was not making a mistake herself.

"Yes," said Nanny, fretfully; "go on, how slow you are to-day."

Charlotte felt the reproach was merited, and tried hard to remember some portion of that first division of the sermon which might suit the old woman's case, but only detached sentences occurred to her, that she was afraid Nanny would regard as reflections on her particular infirmity.

"I'll come again to-morrow and tell you about
" she said at last.



"No, you won't," replied Nanny; "if I don't have it now I shan't get it at all."

And Charlotte very reluctantly took to shouting again, but the steady gaze of Miss Warne's eyes, and the repetitions were so confusing, that she got on very badly indeed.

"I don't believe that was it," said old Nanny, crossly; "you're telling me all wrong."

"I don't intend to, indeed," screamed Charlotte, as the tears started into her eyes. "Perhaps I shall remember it better to-morrow."

"No, you won't! And what came next? Who ever heard of a sermon with only one head to it!"

But the second had slipped out of Charlotte's recollection altogether, and, as she tried to recall it without success, she almost felt guilty of old Nanny's next accusation—not having listened to the sermon herself "when it was a preaching."

"And what has *she* come for?" asked the old woman, pointing to Miss Warne, who was rising to go, perhaps out of compassion to Charlotte's increasing difficulties.

"To see you, Nanny. It's Aunt Janet, and perhaps she will come again another week."

"Tell her I don't want her," said Nanny, who forgot that other folks were not so deaf as herself. "I ain't fond of being looked at. What, are you going? Dear me, and we ain't had much except the text! What was the use of coming?"

Charlotte, of course, could not say; and as she

left Nanny's cottage, she was sadly ashamed of the two specimens her Aunt Janet had had of her way of conducting "parish business." The class was bad enough, but this visit to Nanny Sparks had been worse still, and she felt that she could not be much surprised if her aunt were to forbid her meddling in such matters for the future.

"I hope you did not mind her, aunt," she said, feeling that Nanny's behaviour needed some apology too. "I don't think she meant to be rude."

"No, she is old and afflicted," replied Miss Warne, "and we must make some allowance for that."

But there were no extenuating circumstances to plead, Charlotte feared, for her own dismal failure.

However, the visit to old Giles was a great deal pleasanter.

"Oh, come to talk the sermon over," he said, as Charlotte and her aunt entered his cottage; "that's nice!" And he put chairs for them both, and hoped Miss Warne was well, and had been able to keep awake through the service the evening before.

"Oh dear yes," she replied, a little shocked by the implied doubt; "I always do."

"Ah, what a blessed thing that is to be sure! And able to carry it away too like Miss Charlotte here, I dare say! I don't know what I should do without her."

Charlotte blushed a little, and was afraid her to be of much service to him was about to

be exposed. But old Giles liked to think and talk about one point before going to another, and so the sermon grew gradually clearer to her; and though she did not get on so well as usual, the old man seemed thoroughly satisfied.

Then another deaf old woman was visited, a truant Sunday-school scholar hunted up, and the afternoon's work was done. "A very bad one," Charlotte thought, with a sigh; but it was better than Tom's, which had not progressed at all.

"Oh, is that you?" he said, looking up from his heap, as Charlotte wearily entered the room. "How soon you are back!"

"Am I?" returned Charlotte. "It seems to me as if we had been such a long while gone."

"We," repeated Tom; "why, who went with you?"

"Oh, Aunt Janet; it was very kind of her, but still I could have got on better without her."

"I should think you could," said Tom. "I should like to see her helping me!"

He seemed to need assistance from some one, however, for the heap had far outstretched its proper limits; and as she moved about to put her things away, Charlotte trod on peas and other articles that were strewn about the floor. But she had no heart to complain even of that uncomfortable state of things, and went downstairs into the empty study, intending to think over her perplexities; but finding it easier when she got there to cry over them instead. Then hearing, at last, her papa's

step in the passage, she thought she had better go and see about tea; but he came straight into the study, and finding her there, sat down and poked up the dull fire.

"Why, what is the matter?" he asked, as the first gleam of light showed him Charlotte's red eyes.

"I hardly know, papa; I'm afraid I'm very silly."

"So am I, sometimes, and the wisest folks too, I dare say; but it's hardly worth while to cry about it."

"No, papa; but when it vexes anybody else, you can't help it."

"And who have you been vexing?"

"Oh, poor old Nanny Sparks, papa. I could not recollect the sermon for her to-day."

"Why, how was that?"

"Oh, because Aunt Janet was with me I think, papa. It was very kind of her to go, but it made me forget almost all I had meant to say."

"Well, that was rather foolish, certainly, Charlotte. I wonder whether Aunt Janet is ever afraid of you."

"Of me. Oh no, papa, nobody is."

"I don't know that, Charlotte. Do you remember what she said yesterday about finding it so difficult to do well?"

"Yes, papa; but then she cannot be troubled in my kind of way."

"Well, if your kind of way means forgetting a

sermon when the time came for saying it, I think she might. I have reason to believe that Aunt Janet is almost as doubtful of her own powers as you are of yours, Charlotte, and that just now she is feeling very nervous about the work that lies before her."

"Do you mean minding us, papa?"

"Yes, Charlotte—no easy matter, I am afraid, now that we have grown to be independent folks, finding rules and regulations of all kinds objectionable; and I think it would be better if, instead of being afraid of her, we were to see what we could do to help her."

"Yes, papa, I would indeed, if only I knew how."

"Well, the way will come if you only try to find it."

"And then, papa, I think Aunt Janet fancies I cannot do anything. She seemed so much surprised at my having a class in the school, and did not like my going out this afternoon."

"No, at fifteen she was no doubt at school herself, and so was not prepared to find things reversed with you. We must not forget that her experience in most things has been entirely different from ours, and we shall have to meet her half way if we are to expect to get on together."

"And must I give up my class, papa, and visiting in the village?"

"Not unless Aunt Janet wishes it; and I do not think she will."

"But she told me I was too young for the visiting, papa, and talks of doing it herself."

"Probably because she thought it taxed you too heavily; but if she finds you like it, I am sure she will not object to your keeping it up."

"Ah, but I am afraid she won't think that after what she saw this afternoon. I was nearly crying with vexation, and poor Nanny Sparks was so cross. And yesterday things were nearly as bad at the school."

"Perhaps you fancied so, Charlotte, because you were more anxious than usual to do your work well. But, my dear, you must learn to be a little patient over your own failures. The best of us do our work badly at times."

"I should not think you ever do, papa."

"Shouldn't you? Ah, that is because I am so used to my blunders that I have given up taking them to heart in the desperate way you do. And then," continued Mr. Warne, after a pause, "we must not forget, Charlotte, that we serve but one Master."

"Oh no, papa, I know that."

"And that He judges our shortcomings more tenderly than we do ourselves. You remember how graciously He said of the poor woman who was anxious to show her love to Him, 'She hath done what she could,' and I do not suppose that she went away after that lamenting because her service had seemed poor and unprofitable."

And so Charlotte took comfort, and thought she



would pay Nanny Sparks a visit the next day, and try in every way to be a help to her Aunt Janet. But then, as Mr. Warne had remarked of her, it was Aunt Janet's misfortune never to show that she stood in need of any one's help. It is true that she looked a little puzzled at times, but it always seemed to be more over other people's mistakes than her own. And such demonstrations, of course, were not pleasant to anybody, though how Miss Warne, who had passed all her life in orderly households, and found herself suddenly in one very much the reverse, could help making them it is difficult to say. But to people who cannot find time to wash their hands before meals, or keep down unruly tufts, like Tom's, a particularly trim toilet in any one else is often irritating. Mr. Warne liked to see it. Perhaps he thought that his sister's rustling silk and spotless Quaker cap shed a little refinement over his not very nicely appointed household, but the boys could see nothing but a very offensive contrast, and even Charlotte, who was at an awkward age, and had managed, besides, like poor Johnny Barker, to decorate her fingers with several unsightly chilblains, was glad to sit as far from Miss Warne as possible. Still she knew it was quite right for her to be neat, and would have been sorry to see her otherwise. All that distressed her about it was that the neatness should be constantly asserting itself, and quarrelling with every little bit of disorder about it. Her mamma had been equally nice in her dress, though of course without Aunt Janet's pre-

ciseness, and yet Charlotte never remembered having felt ashamed of chilblains or rough hair before her. But then, as she thought about it, she did not feel quite sure of having had chilblains on any previous winter, and fancied it likely she might have bestowed a great deal more care on her own appearance before she had been obliged to dress Hetty every morning, help Tom on with his lazy toilet, and then steal down to see that Nancy got the breakfast in proper time. And so, perhaps, the reason why her mamma's refinement had not seemed out of place at the vicarage was because other things were more in harmony with it, but the change from neatness to disorder had been so gradual—creeping on imperceptibly from the time Mrs. Warne had first been obliged to relax in her domestic duties—that Charlotte had scarcely noticed it till Miss Warne's remarkable trimness suddenly announced it to every one, even including Tom. But what was to be done? Chilblains and bad manners are not to be got rid of in a day, and in the meantime Aunt Janet did not seem disposed to treat them with the forbearance their owners fancied they merited.

"I have brought you some glycerine for your hands, my dear," remarked Miss Warne to Charlotte, as she came in one afternoon from the town. "It distresses me to see them in such a state."

"But Johnny Barker's are much worse, aunt."

"Very likely; but he has had no fire to keep him warm this winter, I think you told me, and you have."

That was true ; but Charlotte had had a great deal of rough work to do, and as she went upstairs carrying her glycerine, she wondered whether her aunt would think the assistance she gave Nancy any excuse for her red, swollen hands.

So the chilblains being attended to, Miss Warne's next care was the bad manners, beginning, as was best, perhaps, with Nancy's. There had been no improvement in that stubborn handmaiden since Miss Warne's coming. She had resisted all orders, done her work as badly as possible, and was going back to those pilfering habits that had some time before been a source of so much anxiety to Charlotte. But Charlotte's way of remedying them did not, of course, occur to Miss Warne. She found that Nancy was helping herself to any stores that took her fancy, but did not see any other way of stopping her but putting a key on the cupboard. It was a desperate step to take, keys never having been heard of at the vicarage before ; but there seemed no help for it ; and Miss Warne, a little nervously, opened her difficulty to Charlotte one morning.

"My dear, I am afraid that Nancy is not quite honest."

"No, aunt ; she used not to be before I gave her lessons ; but then she got a little better."

"How was that, Charlotte ? What did you teach her ?"

"Oh, just what I do Tom, aunt—reading,

writing, and sums; and they did her so much good."

"But the benefit does not seem to have been very lasting, you see, for she is going back to her old ways. And the only thing to be done now, I think, is to get keys."

"We never used to have any, aunt," said Charlotte, a little alarmed at such an innovation.

"No, dear, not in your mamma's time; but neither you nor I seem to be able to get on without them. I'll speak to Nancy first; but I am afraid that it will not be any use."

And Charlotte, of course, was equally doubtful on that score; but she thought, perhaps, it was only right that Nancy should have due warning before the locking-up system was adopted. So it was given her some time in the course of the day, very quietly, no doubt, as Miss Warne did most things; but Nancy, instead of profiting by it, and promising better things for the future, chose to think herself ill-used, and burst in to Charlotte with the complaint that she had been telling tales of her.

"No, I have not, Nancy," replied Charlotte, gravely; "you have brought it on yourself by going back to your old ways."

"What ways, Miss Charlotte?" asked Nancy, saucily.

"Why, taking things out of the store-closet. You know I had to tell you of it before, and you promised never to do it again."

"Oh, did I! I should like to see any of 'em up at Fairlawn making such a promise! Why, Mrs. Jennings has got everything in her charge, and they all help themselves just as they please."

"But perhaps their mistress does not know it, Nancy."

"No, of course not; she wouldn't trouble herself about such trifles, and they wouldn't bear it if she did. And I ain't going to neither, miss; nor wouldn't, not to live in the best place as ever was!"

"Hush, Nancy! it isn't right to talk so. If you will promise to do better, and keep your word, I dare say Aunt Janet will soon learn to trust you as fully as mamma did."

"But I ain't going to give her the chance, Miss Charlotte. I said I wouldn't bear her interference before she came, and I'm of the same mind still!"

And from that resolution Nancy was not to be moved; so Charlotte gave her up for the time, hoping that her prudent counsels would be more patiently listened to on the morrow. But all that day Nancy went about the house with her old defiant air, and the little work she did get through was so badly done that it would have been better, perhaps, to have left it alone altogether. The dinner was utterly spoilt, and made still more unpalatable by the sobs and gasps with which it was served up. Mr. Warne looked grave, and Tom and Willy rebellious; the two latter, it was plain, took Nancy's side of the quarrel.

"I am afraid," said the Vicar, "that something has gone wrong."

Miss Warne was not fond of bringing domestic grievances forward before the whole party, but there seemed no help for it then, and Nancy's misde-means were fully detailed.

"Oh, taken a little jam!" said Tom, much in the same tone in which Nancy might have referred to the matter herself.

"Yes, but when people steal, Tom, I don't see that it greatly matters whether it is much or little. But, Charlotte, have you never had any reason to suspect Nancy's honesty before?"

"Yes, papa," and Charlotte had to explain, a little tearfully, how she had detected Nancy's daily pilferings, and won her back for a time to better behaviour by those important lessons; and when she had finished, Mr. Warne relapsed into one of his fits of absence, during which his burnt chop was disposed of, without any consciousness apparently of its unpalatable condition. But it is probable that he only took that far-off journey for the better consideration of Nancy's case, for later in the day he called Charlotte into the study, and told her he was very well satisfied with her share of the business. "Only," he said, "it would have been better if you had consulted me about it first."

"But I never like to bring little household matters to you, papa, when I can help it."

"But this was not exactly a little matter, Charlotte, because Nancy's well-being was in danger as

well as our tea and sugar. However, I doubt whether I could have suggested a wiser course than the one you took, so it is only for your sake that I wish you to let me bear my share of the household burden."

"But there is Aunt Janet now, papa."

"Yes; and she will kindly take it off both our shoulders while she is here, I dare say. As to Nancy, I must speak to her some time to-day, and see what I can do with her."

But Tom was beforehand with his bit of advice.

"If I were you, Nancy," he said, "I would run away."

He had thought the matter over with great gravity as he swung his legs to and fro on the kitchen table, and this seemed the only course he could conscientiously suggest.

"But there's my box, Master Tom," returned Nancy.

That was a difficulty, certainly, and for a few minutes Tom seemed rather posed. Of course people in general who ran away did not possess boxes, he reflected. Joe Purkiss could not have had one, for his getting it out of that high window on the memorable night of his disappearance would have been an utter impossibility.

"Couldn't you leave it behind, Nancy?" Tom asked at last, not seeing any other way of disposing of it.

"Not while it's got my best gown and bonnet in it," replied Nancy with great decision.

"Then make them up into a bundle," cried Tom, thinking that he had discovered the correct thing at last. "That'll be the way!"

"What, and crush all the flowers and new blond cap, Master Tom! No, not all the new missuses in the world should force me into that!"

"But then I don't see how you're to get off, Nancy."

"Oh, but I do, Master Tom—box and all. I'm not going to steal away in the dark, as if I had done something to be ashamed of."

This seemed to Tom a very mistaken view on Nancy's part of his favourite mode of evasion. The darker the night, in his opinion, and stricter the secrecy and mystery of the business altogether, the more delightful it was. However, he set Nancy's obtuseness down to the circumstance of her being a girl, and having to carry her personal property about in such a very objectionable receptacle. If it had not been for that she would have fallen in with his suggestion immediately, he felt sure, which would have been such an immense relief to everybody. And late that night, when Charlotte thought he was asleep, he startled her by saying that he was "very glad he hadn't any box."

"Why, Tom?"

"Because people that have, get too fond of it sometimes; and then, when they want to go anywhere in a hurry, and don't like to leave it behind, I can't see what they're to do."

Charlotte replied that she could not, either, but

that she scarcely thought it likely Tom would ever have to start off on such pressing business as not to have time to do his packing properly. Tom, however, was not so sure on that point, but he was getting sleepy, and did not attempt to argue the matter any further.

CHAPTER VII.

AND so in the course of the next week keys were fitted into every keyhole in the house, with the single exception, perhaps, of the one in Nancy's box. It was best, as Tom remarked, to do the thing thoroughly while you were about it; and he rather enjoyed being able to secure his own property against the marauding incursions of Willy and Hetty. But Nancy, of course, was not so well pleased with the arrangement. Besides the personal insult implied in it, there was the necessity of abstaining from undue indulgence in the store-closet dainties; and Nancy thought more longingly than ever of Fairlawn, where people were allowed to help themselves to things as they pleased. Mr. Warne did his best to make her see that to endeavour to do well would bring her more real satisfaction in the end than the most unlimited self-indulgence; but when she had once taken a notion into her head, Nancy was as difficult to persuade as Tom; and so it was arranged, at last, that she should leave.

"But who is to take her place I have not the

least idea," said Mr. Warne, who was, of course, well acquainted with the resources of Cumberstone.

"Perhaps Bridget would come," remarked his sister.

Bridget was the old confidential servant left in charge of Miss Warne's pleasant little cottage some hundred miles away. But Mr. Warne, knowing that, though faithful and hard-working, she had a will of her own that might be a little in the way at the vicarage, did not fall in readily with the proposition.

"I am afraid she would want to set us to rights rather too fast, Janet," he said, "and so perhaps it will be best to get on as well as we can for awhile."

And Miss Warne, not knowing the difficulties she was bringing on herself, undertook to look out in Cumberstone for another servant.

"Couldn't I inquire for you, aunt?" asked Charlotte, who knew that Miss Warne's trim toilet and stiff manners would give even greater offence in the village than they did at the vicarage.

"No, my dear, I think this a matter that I ought to attend to myself. But I should be very glad of your company, if you would come and show me where I had better go."

"Oh, wouldn't I lead her a nice dance," said Tom, a few minutes later, peeping into the bedroom where Charlotte was tying on her hat. "Where are you going to take her?"

"Oh, I don't know, Tom—to the Wright's and the Pritchets's, I suppose."

"Oh, the Pritchets!—with two grey-headed sons working on old Purkiss's farm! Which of them is to come, Charlotte?"

"Why neither, of course. You know I did not mean that, Tom. But they are kind old people, and might be able to tell us of some one that would suit us."

"Oh dear, that's rather a roundabout way of going to work. Aunt Janet had better take me."

But Charlotte was of a different opinion, and went on leisurely with her dressing, which was a longer business now than it used to be, as her aunt always liked to see her warmly wrapped up as well as neat.

"Oh dear, anybody would think you were going to California," said Tom, who, not being very well up in geographical matters, fancied all far-off places were cold. "I say, why don't you take her to the Sykes's?"

"Oh, Tom! the worst people in the village. How can you think of such a thing?"

"But they've got such a lot of daughters, and Selina Sykes is looking out."

Selina Sykes always had been looking out, as long as Charlotte could remember, but she was sadly afraid it must have been for something bad, as nothing else ever seemed to come in her way.

"And then there are the Dempseys," pursued Tom. But Charlotte was dressed by that time, and so went downstairs to join her aunt, only relieved

by the thought that Tom, one element of mischief, at least, would be left safely behind.

But even had he been with them things could scarcely have gone worse. The Pritchets were visited first—Charlotte's pattern couple—but they shook their heads over the possibility of finding a good servant in Cumberstone, and gave Miss Warne such a dreadful picture of the depravity of the place, that she gathered her shining skirts closer round her as she entered the next cottage—a movement that did not, of course, escape the sharp eyes of its mistress, and brought on her a rough reception. Poor Charlotte felt she was doing her part very badly, and thought that perhaps even Tom could hardly have managed worse.

"I am afraid your papa is labouring among very bad people," said Miss Warne, as she emerged, a little flushed, into the open air again.

"I don't know that they are bad exactly, aunt; at least not all of them; only they do not like strangers."

"But that is very wrong, Charlotte. You know we are told to be kind to strangers."

"Yes, aunt." But then it occurred to Charlotte that, standing in a dirty cottage, with her rich silk and lace held carefully aside, Miss Warne did not look like a stranger calling for any hospitable attentions.

"And now, my dear, where do you think we had better go next?"

Charlotte was just then considering that ques-

tion herself; but seeing old Giles nodding at them from his cottage door, they went across the road to speak to him.

"Ah, going about visiting," he said; "that's nice! And been to see Jane Croft? Well, I'm glad of that, because her husband's bad, and she'd take it so kind of you."

"But we did not go to see him," replied Miss Warne. "We wanted to know if she would like to place one of her daughters out to service, and she would scarcely give us a civil answer."

"Ah, busy, perhaps; that's apt to make folks cross. But she'll let one of 'em come, if you want her, I dare say."

"But I don't think I do. After seeing what the mother is, I should be afraid to venture on taking one of her daughters. We must go elsewhere, I suppose."

"Yes, and then you'll find plenty. There's all the Lawsons, and the Sykes girls. Fine young women, look so nice of a Sunday!"

But Miss Warne thought that a doubtful recommendation, fearing it might imply an undue love of dress, and did not inquire where the "fine young women" were to be found.

"Thank you," she replied, as she turned away, "we must do the best we can."

"And you won't forget to listen to-morrow, miss, will you?" piped the old man after Charlotte. "It'll be Sunday, you know. Ah what a thing it is to be able to keep awake!"

And then they went down the street, calling at the Wrights', where they found two girls sitting at their lace pillows, but not looking strong enough for any more active kind of work.

"I am afraid it is no use to stay and tell our errand here," said Miss Warne. But still she sat down, letting her neat skirts fall on the sanded floor without any fear, apparently, of their being damaged by their contact with it; and Charlotte, glancing at her thought what a nice kind lady her Aunt Janet looked. But then her attention was taken up by two sick girls instead of Jane Croft's dirt and rudeness, which was likely to give her a pleasanter aspect.

"Did you come to see mother?" asked the elder of the two girls, flushing in a nervous way that would rather have surprised Nancy, and probably the Miss Sykeses, who had never had anything to do with lace pillows.

"Well, my business was chiefly with you," replied Miss Warne. "I wanted to know if you were either of you willing to go out to service, but I see it's no use to ask."

"No, I'm afraid we ain't good for much except the lace work, ma'am," said the girl, sadly. "I never was strong; but Susan used to be before she took to sitting so much, and mother thinks it's that that's hurt her."

"I dare say it is; but could you not both break it off gradually by doing more active work, a little at a time, as your strength would let you?"

"Susan might, ma'am, but it's too late for me, because my breath's bad, and I can't do anything now even about the place. I'm very sorry for that, as it makes it so hard for mother."

Miss Warne looked as if she would have liked to be kind if she could, but only one way suggested itself, and, as she left the cottage, she put something into the elder girl's hand, telling her it was to buy her some wine.

"Oh thank you, ma'am," replied the girl flushing painfully again, "but we have all we want; Mr. Warne sees to that."

"I dare say he does, but you must let me do my little part too sometimes." And Miss Warne passed out of the cottage looking as tremulous and dissatisfied with herself as Charlotte had the week before, when she left old Nanny Sparks.

"I am very glad you go round to the poor early, my dear," she said to Charlotte. "It's best for them and you too."

Charlotte was very much relieved to hear her aunt say so, but wondered by what process she had arrived at the conclusion.

"It will make you understand their ways," pursued Miss Warne, "and unless one does that, it is difficult to know how to be kind to them. All I can do, you see, Charlotte, is to put my hand in my pocket."

"But that was very kind of you, aunt, and I am sure they thought so."

"Well, I hope they did; but it is not the only help

one ought to give. And there is Jane Croft's husband ill too. I did not know that, or I should have been more patient with her. Poverty and sickness are enough to try the best of tempers. We must go and see her again to-morrow, Charlotte."

And Miss Warne walked on in grave silence till the end of the village was reached, when she suddenly recollected the errand they were out upon, and asked Charlotte where they were to go next.

"I really don't know, aunt. The Sykeses are all very bad, and so are the Lawsons, I'm afraid. But there's Mary Barker looking out of her cottage—Johnny Barker's mother, aunt—and perhaps she can help us."

But Mary Barker could only repeat old Dame Pritchett's account of the unpromising state of the young women of Cumberstone.

"It isn't that they're so bad altogether, though ma'am," said she, "only they like to take to work as they can do at home, and then have their Sundays free for gadding."

"But that is very bad for them," said Miss Warne.

"Yes, I know it is, ma'am, only as it's pleasant they don't trouble their heads about anything else. And then the few steady ones that have took to service are gone right away, so I don't expect you'll be able to suit yourself nearer than the town, and they don't say much for the servants there."

"Then I am afraid we shall not find any improvement upon Nancy," said Miss Warne, as they walked home, "I wonder if she could be persuaded to do better, and stay."

They made the attempt, but Nancy, seeing how matters stood, grew more independent than ever, and retracted a promise she had already given to remain till they were suited.

"It's likely I shall be wanted elsewhere," she said, "and I guess you'll get on somehow."

"Well, I suppose we must," was Mr. Warne's reflection, but his sister's thoughts turned tenderly to Bridget again, and she proposed her coming till they were suited, saying that she should not mind the expense.

"Nor should I," replied Mr. Warne, "it is Mistress Bridget herself I object to. Nancy does not obey my orders certainly, but then she allows me equal freedom on my side, which is a bit of generosity that I should not expect from Bridget."

"And yet she is an invaluable servant; I don't know how I shall get on without her when I am ill."

"Perhaps not, but I think we are all pretty well at present, and would rather she stayed where she is. Suppose we follow Mary Barker's advice on Monday, Janet, and inquire for a servant in the town."

And so, as the Saturday was far advanced, the matter was put aside, and the coming Sunday, with

its pleasant duties, talked of instead. But a cloud was still resting on Miss Warne's mind. She had seen a little of the dark side of Cumberstone that day, and the thought of the wickedness that had been going on during her brother's sixteen years' ministry there was very depressing.

"I wonder you are able to talk so hopefully of your work, William," she said, "when so much of it seems thrown away."

"Don't say that, Janet. If my sermon only keeps old Giles awake for five minutes to-morrow, I must not think it wasted."

"Yes, but just consider what a number there are who never attend to you. It was dreadful to hear what I did this afternoon only of the young women."

"But wickedness always comes uppermost, you must not forget that. The quiet folks who are doing their duty and leading Christian lives, one seldom hears much about, and there are many such in Cumberstone, I am thankful to say."

"But you cannot help looking on the other side sometimes."

"Of course not, but even then one often sees something hopeful. There is generally the germ of better things discernible which one trusts to see spring up and bear fruit some day. Without the hope of that, a minister's work would, no doubt, be disheartening enough."

But it was in Mr. Warne's nature to look on the bright side of things, and so he thought of his

Sunday's work with pleasure, though old Giles would be sure to be asleep through the greater part of the services, and the Sykeses only come to church to show off their finery. The same things were going on elsewhere than in Cumberstone, he knew, and besides, he must take people as they were, and try to make the best of them.

CHAPTER VIII.

EARLY on Monday afternoon, Miss Warne, in her trim walking dress, looked into the parlour where Charlotte was sitting at work with Tom and Hetty.

"My dear, I am afraid that you must take your little round without me to-day. Perhaps one of the boys can go with you."

"Oh yes, aunt, I can," said Tom, who was giving his attention ostensibly to his "Delectus," but did not, of course, find the occupation agreeable.

"But I think Frank or Willy would be a more proper escort, Tom."

However, he could not see that, and Charlotte said her papa thought Tom's protection quite sufficient, even as far as the town.

"And if I can't take care of her she can of me," said Tom, "so we shall get on somehow."

And with that arrangement, Miss Warne had to be satisfied, and started on her errand to the town, which was to find a successor to Nancy.

But Charlotte still worked on for some time after her aunt had gone. She had never taken Tom with her on her "parish business" before, always

having been allowed to get through it alone, and she had sad misgivings as to how he might conduct himself. But Tom, of course, had no fears on that score. Paying old Giles a visit would be fine fun, he thought, and seeing Charlotte preach, better entertainment still; and he wanted to know presently when she was going.

"Oh, I don't know, Tom. I suppose I ought not to put it off, because they always expect me every Monday; only——"

"Only what?"

"Why, I am so afraid that you won't behave properly, Tom. You don't always, you know."

This was a fact Tom could not deny, but he asked her rather naturally what that had to do with it, as the teaching would all fall to her share and not his.

So a little reluctantly Charlotte put on her things, and the two started together.

"You'll try to be good, won't you?" she said persuasively, but Tom's shouting out to Willy as they passed the study window, that Charlotte was off preaching, and he was going to be clerk, was anything but a satisfactory answer to her appeal.

However, fortunately, Tom's love of mischief received a little check before the first cottage was reached. As they turned into the village, he suddenly looked rather alarmed, and proposed their darting down a by-lane, which would have led them, in Charlotte's opinion, considerably out of the way.



"Oh well, it don't matter," said Tom, "he can't kill me." And then looking up, Charlotte saw old Farmer Purkiss right in front of them.

"Oh, it's you, is it!" he said, shaking his stick at Tom. "And what do you think of yourself, I should like to know!"

But Tom, unfortunately, was not in the habit of thinking much about himself, except in the way of providing for his own comfort, and so he replied with truth, that he could not say.

"Well, I can, and my opinion's pretty plain. Perhaps Miss Charlotte here would like to hear it."

"Oh dear no, thank you, I'd rather not," said Charlotte.

"Well, your papa shall the first time I can catch him."

"Why, what have I done?" asked Tom, sturdily.

"Oh, you don't know, of course. It wasn't you that set the boys to be saucy yesterday, and make fun of all I said."

"Oh, I hope not!" said Charlotte.

"But he did, and he's at the bottom of every bit of mischief that goes on in my class. And if he doesn't mend," continued the old man, with his stick lifted threateningly over Tom's head, "he'll soon be the worst boy in the parish, and a disgrace to his father."

It was shocking to hear that, and after the old farmer had passed on his way, Charlotte began to cry, and asked Tom how he could do such dreadful things.

"Well, why doesn't he teach better," said Tom. "Who could help laughing sometimes?"

"Oh, I think you could if you tried. You know papa says we should always respect any one who does his best. And then, oh, Tom, you must not forget Roger Sykes!"

Roger Sykes was a boy who had died suddenly a short time before; and the sad fact of his having behaved ill on his last attendance at the school, had been held up since as a warning to any children who seemed disposed to abuse their Sunday privileges.

"But he was a great deal older than I am," said Tom.

"Yes, but you know papa says we are all of us either getting better or worse; and if you do not try to be good now, Tom, you may be as bad as poor Roger Sykes was when you get to be his age." And Charlotte was so much distressed at the prospect that it was fortunate she had notes of her papa's sermon in her pocket, or the principal divisions, a matter on which Nanny Sparks was very particular, would have been quite forgotten.

"Well, here we are!" said Tom, kicking Nanny's gate open, "and you may go in by yourself if you like."

Perhaps he rather doubted his own power of resisting temptation, and in his softened mood thought it more prudent to remain outside.

"Oh, thank you, Tom," replied Charlotte; "but are you sure you won't mind?"

"No, I can keep myself warm," and Tom set off at a run down the village.

It was very kind of him, Charlotte thought, and she went in to old Nanny's quite hopeful as to Tom's reformation. But by the time she came out again Tom had had leisure for reflection, and was ready, as usual, to lay the blame on any one but himself.

"I suppose that's the way he got rid of Joe," he said.

"Who, Farmer Purkiss? Oh no, Tom; they say he is so much kinder than he used to be. I am not at all afraid of him now."

"No, because you are not in his class. I wonder if he used to teach Joe."

"No, I don't think he had a class before Joe went away. But it is not always Farmer Purkiss who makes the boys naughty. He never taught Roger Sykes, you know."

But Tom did not want to have to reconsider that unpleasant history. He was only just recovering from the effects of the last reference to it, and feeling himself as ready to fight for his own will and pleasure again, as if no Roger Sykes had ever tried the same plan before, and found it a miserable failure in the end. Besides, there were still plenty to keep him company in his independence at the school, Tom thought,—thriving lads not likely to be cut off suddenly as Roger had been, and so he tried to put him out of his mind altogether; and when old Giles's cottage was reached, preferred to

follow Charlotte in, to being left alone with his own thoughts outside.

"Ah, that's right," said the old man, nodding and smiling to his visitors. "I've been expecting it all the afternoon."

"But you should have taken it at the right time," said Tom. "It isn't the thing to preach a sermon over twice."

"Oh, but Miss Charlotte doesn't mind, I'm sure; she's always ready for anybody as wants to hear. But perhaps you don't like sermons, Master Tom."

Tom did not make any answer to that; and Charlotte sat down at Master Giles's little round table, on which he had placed his large old Bible, in preparation for the coming sermon.

"I've brought some notes to-day," said Charlotte, blushing as she took out her papers.

"Oh, have you? I dare say they're very nice, but I'd rather have had the sermon."

"Oh, and so you will; they are all about it; only I thought I had better write it down, because I got on so badly last time."

"Did you? I never found it out. We'd a bit here and a bit there, and they was all much to the purpose, I think."

"But Charlotte wasn't satisfied," put in Tom, "and so she brought me and the notes to-day to help her."

"Oh, the notes may be well enough, Master Tom," said old Giles; "though I'd rather hear what she's got to say out of her own head; but your helping's

another matter, at least in this way," and he laid his hand on his open Bible.

Tom coloured a little. He had come in to hear a sermon, but had no idea of its being addressed to him.

"I say," he said, "when are you going to begin?"

"Oh, we'll have the text first, Master Tom," replied old Giles, "and I can find that for myself. What a comfort I am able to keep awake long enough to bring that away. It's often as good as a sermon of itself, for Mr. Warne always chooses such speaking ones. And here it is, Miss Charlotte. 'The steps of a good man are ordered by the Lord, and He delighteth in his way.' I've had that in my mind ever since, but I'm afraid I'm too bad for it to mean me."

"But a good man does not mean in the Bible a faultless one, Master Giles."

"No, I know that; it means one who trusts in the Lord, and that's me sure enough, Miss Charlotte; and one that takes all the good of this life and the next as his free gift, and that's me too. But still He can't delight in my way, it's too bad; nothing will ever make me believe that."

"But if it is his way, and He teaches you to walk in it, I think He may."

"Ah, I had forgotten that, Miss Charlotte. 'Let the wicked forsake *his* way'; well I've done that, for it was a bad one, and gave me no comfort—'and let him return unto the Lord'—that is, take his way—'and He will have mercy upon him; and

to our God, for He will abundantly pardon.' Yes, Miss Charlotte, so He will, and even delight in my way as long as it is his—not for any good that I have done, but for his name's sake." And so poor old Giles, silly on all points except where he had been taught of the Lord, preached such a sermon to himself that Charlotte thought it best to put her notes quietly in her pocket, and let him talk on as he pleased.

But Tom was not so well satisfied. The expedition altogether had not proved so entertaining as he had expected, and he returned home rather out of spirits.

"Well," said Willy, looking up from his books, as Tom entered the study, "how did the preaching go on?"

"Oh, I don't know," replied Tom; "old Giles had it all his own way. He gave us two sermons, one to me, and the other to himself, and I don't know which was the worst."

"The one to you, I expect," said Frank, gravely; "I am afraid you don't like being preached to."

"Well, who does?" replied Tom; and he settled himself down to his "Delectus" with the feeling of being slightly ill-used.

"And first," he remarked, looking up presently, "there was old Purkiss standing at a corner with his great stick. And I should like to know how you would have fancied that!"

"Well, not at all," replied Frank, "if he had

intended to lay it about my shoulders. But if you are always getting into mischief, Tom, I don't see how you are to expect anything but sticks and sermons."

And finding no consolation was to be had out of Frank, Tom studied his lesson in silence.

But upstairs in Charlotte's room that night, tucked away in the snug little bed beside hers, Tom began to wonder whether Farmer Purkiss would carry that unpleasant communication respecting the misdoings in his class to Mr. Warne as he had threatened.

"I dare say he will," said Charlotte, who was, of course, consulted in the matter. "You know he always keeps his word, Tom."

"Well, I don't care if he does; papa won't pay any attention to him."

"Oh yes, he will, for he is always so much grieved when we have not been doing right. Oh, how I wish you would try to please him, Tom!"

"Well, so I do," replied Tom, "only now there's such a lot," and then he made a mental list of his persecutors, beginning with Aunt Janet and Farmer Purkiss, till his thoughts somehow wandered off to the solitary window in the farmer's old house that looked out on Spring Lane.

"I wonder how high it is," he said; "Joe Purkiss's window, you know."

But Charlotte was busy trying to soothe Hetty, who had an unusual fit of wakefulness upon her, and replied that she could not tell.

"Twice as high as this, I should think," continued Tom, "and fifty times as difficult to get out at."

"Oh dear, I'm glad we haven't got it here," said Hetty, fretfully.

"Why?" asked Tom.

"Because somebody would be wanting to climb out of it, and that would be so dreadful."

Tom said he did not think it dreadful at all, and had no doubt that if Joe Purkiss came home the next day he would do the very same thing over again—an opinion that made Hetty cry outright; but Charlotte succeeded in quieting her at last by the assurance that Joe Purkiss had grown too old and too wise ever to think of climbing out of window any more. So Hetty took comfort and went to sleep, but Tom continued his cogitations awhile longer to the great annoyance of Charlotte, who thought as she laid her own head on the pillow, what a dreadful thing it was to have a bad conscience.

But Tom did not seem of the same opinion. He woke lively enough the next morning, and soon forgot all his fears of Farmer Purkiss in his interest in what was going on in the house. Not that there was anything unusual astir, but idle folks are apt to hang about and amuse themselves with matters that busy ones would not notice. So Tom found out, among other interesting discoveries, that his Aunt Janet's errand to the town had not prospered, for he heard the advisability of sending for Bridget again

under discussion, as he lingered about in the dining-room after breakfast on the pretence of searching for a lost lesson book.

It would be fine fun, Tom thought, to have Bridget, for, from what he had heard of her, he expected that she was a copy of Aunt Janet, but cast in a rough mould that would make her the lawful victim of any tricks that he or Willy chose to play her.

But Mr. Warne was still averse to the arrangement, and preferred falling back on the resources of Cumberstone, bad as they were.

"And then we may be left without any one," said Miss Warne, "for Nancy seems determined to go at the end of the week. I fancy she has some other place in view."

"Very likely," returned Mr. Warne, "places seem easier to find than servants. But really Nancy's services have been worth so very little lately, that I think we might have got on almost as well without them."

"Except in the rough work we certainly might; and I suppose, if she leaves before we are suited, I must do as well as I can." But, of course, such a prospect looked very unpleasant in the eyes of an orderly gentlewoman like Miss Warne.

"And I am afraid I shall not be able to assist you," said the Vicar. "Tom, if you can't find your book, go to the study without it, and tell the others I shall be with them in a minute."

Tom went, of course, but did not betake himself

at once to the study as he was told. The kitchen-door was open, and he could not resist the temptation of looking in to tell Nancy the new maid had come.

Nancy dropped her scrubbing-brush, and stared at Tom in amazement.

"You don't say so, Master Tom! Why, whoever is it?"

"Aunt Janet!" chuckled Tom; "she's going to do the work now. Shan't we have a clean house!" And he trod cautiously back to the study, where the other two boys and Charlotte had been busy for some time over their work.

Early in the afternoon Miss Warne put on her waterproof cloak and goloshes—a necessary precaution against the not very pleasant weather outside, and went into the village again to see what she could find in the way of a maid-servant, her list of qualifications requisite for the office being considerably shortened since the first time she started on a similar errand.

"Shall I go with you, aunt?" said Tom, who, among his other perversities, had a fancy for puddles.

"No, thank you." And he was further told to keep himself quietly in-doors, and be a good boy—two things that Tom, being as usual in an unsettled state of mind, felt rather indisposed to do.

And so Miss Warne went alone, and either the desperate necessity of the case or the bad weather, which always affected her spirits, drove her to

engage a girl whom, at any other time, she would have hesitated to admit within the vicarage gate. She had been to the Sykes's first, seen all the five fine young women, and been so alarmed by the spectacle, that on going into another cottage, and seeing a girl who promised very humbly to do all she was told, Miss Warne gave way at once, and accepted her as Nancy's successor; but going back she felt a little uneasy about what she had done. Perhaps it would have been better to consult her brother before settling the matter decisively; but then again came the thought of Nancy's leaving on Saturday, and with it such a torrent of rain on the top of her umbrella, that Miss Warne was driven homewards in a despondent state of mind altogether; and Tom, reconnoitring her hurried entrance from the study window, divined, with great acuteness, that her errand had not been particularly successful.

"She has not found any one," he announced to Frank and Willy; "so it will be Bridget and plenty of fun next week!"

But he discovered soon after that he must give up all hope of that pleasant prospect. Mr. Warne came in late from his work in the village, and sitting down hurriedly to dinner, remarked to his sister that he hoped she had not kept her intention of going out that morning, as it had turned out so wet.

"Yes, I did," replied Miss Warne, nervously, "and have done some mischief, I'm afraid."

"Not engaged old Giles, I hope."

"No, not so bad as that ; but I have taken one of the Dempseys, and perhaps they are not a good set."

"Not at all, I am afraid ; perhaps the worst in the village. But if you have engaged the girl, Janet, we must make the best of her. I suppose it's Keziah ; she's the only daughter at home now, I think."

"Yes, and she promised very fairly."

"Oh, I dare say ; the Dempseys have always done that as long as I can remember them. But when you know Cumberstone as well as I do, Janet, you will find that the fairest promisers are generally the worst performers."

"But you don't know anything really bad of the Dempseys, I hope."

"Well, not much beyond their idleness, and the ill consequences that vice always leads to. They are honest, I believe."

"Which is more than you can say for Nancy," returned Miss Warne, bethinking herself of her raids on the store-closet.

"Certainly ; and yet I do not think Nancy is so bad at heart. She belongs to a good honest family, but, unfortunately, she has had bad advisers in the servants at Fairlawn, and had her head a little turned, perhaps, like some of the rest of us, by being left too much to her own devices lately. I am very sorry for the girl, as she might have suited very well if she had pleased, and made herself happy here."

And some impression to the same effect seemed to take possession of Nancy, when she found that her successor was really engaged, and that her going, therefore, would be a matter of necessity. Then she began to think regretfully of her master, and every one else in the little household to whom her heart was beginning to cling; and grew so tearful and obedient to orders in consequence, that, on the last evening of her stay, Charlotte took her books into the kitchen, thinking it might do Nancy good to have another hour's quiet study of the old lessons. But at the sight of her books, and Charlotte sitting at the little kitchen table just as she used to, Nancy said, before Miss Warne came—the tears fell in such abundance that all thought of reading had to be given up.

“If I hadn't brought it all on myself, Miss Charlotte,” she said, “it wouldn't be so bad. Oh dear, if going without tea and sugar and plums in my pudding for a year or more would make all straight, I'd do it and welcome.”

“But we can never make anything right, Nancy, that we've once done wrong.”

“Yes, so you always say, Miss Charlotte, and I suppose it's all true, but it seems very hard that you can't when you've a mind to.”

“I am very sorry,” said Charlotte, crying a little herself, “for I've grown to like you, and you were getting on so nicely with the lessons. But we must be patient, and if Keziah does not suit, perhaps Aunt Janet will be willing to take you back.”

Nancy did not think that very likely, but even the possibility of such an event seemed to comfort her, and she said she should keep at home over her lace pillow, just to see how things went with her successor before looking out for another place.

"For father does not want me to go to Fairlawn," she continued. "He thinks it hasn't done Jane any good."

"No, and papa thinks so too. I'd rather hear you had gone somewhere else, Nancy. It doesn't make any of us happier, you know, to wear fine clothes and do as we please."

"No, I suppose not, Miss Charlotte; and just now I don't want neither, only to be left here to go on with you and Master Tom like I used to. But you won't give me up quite, miss, will you, though I have been so bad?"

It was not the way at the vicarage to give anybody up, and so Charlotte promised to take Nancy's home with other cottages in her village visiting. This was far more, Nancy owned, than she deserved, and she undertook on her side to keep up her lessons.

"Because they'll just busy me," she said, "and make me feel as if I was working a bit for you still."

"And they'll do you good, Nancy; you must not forget that."

Nancy promised she would not; and a little cheered by both arrangements she left the vicarage on the following day, having seen her box borne off

first in proper style by the carrier. She took leave of all the family except Tom, who was not to be found; but as she made her way slowly round the house, with her handkerchief to her eyes, he looked out from an upper window to tell her not to mind, as he thought of going himself shortly—a mode of comforting her that Nancy did not understand, but felt quite sure Master Tom meant for the best.

“And now,” said Mr. Warne, when Nancy was fairly off the premises, “the next thing to be done, I suppose, will be to take in Keziah. But I cannot help wishing, for the convenience of the family, that she had a more pronounceable name.”

“Oh, but we can change that,” said Miss Warne; “it had better be Jane.”

But having baptized Keziah, and known her from a child in his school, Mr. Warne said he was afraid he should find it difficult to fall in with that arrangement. And besides, he supposed Keziah had as much right to her own particular name, ugly as it was, as he had to his. However, as the matter was not of much moment, he promised to do his best for the future to call her Jane.

“And what are we to call her?” Tom asked shortly after of Charlotte. “I like Keziah best.”

“Oh, but that does not matter, Tom. And besides, it would be very inconvenient to have a servant with two names.”

So there was a difficulty, as Tom did not fail to remark, to begin with, and others followed in due time. The new handmaiden had never been

to service before—a circumstance that did not matter very much, Miss Warne fancied, as she had undertaken to do exactly as she was told; but she forgot that it might lead to sad inconveniences when she was not by to direct her.

“We breakfast at eight,” was her announcement to Keziah on the night of her arrival; and then every one went to bed in the comfortable expectation of finding things much as usual at that time on the following morning.

But Tom, who happened to wander downstairs before anybody else, made a discovery that greatly delighted him, and he ran back again, quite breathless, to Charlotte’s room.

“I say,” he said, “we’re going to breakfast in style to-day!”

“Why, what do you mean, Tom?”

But just then Tom heard Miss Warne going downstairs, and followed instantly, for fear of losing what he called the fun. She went straight, of course, into the dining-room, and looked very much surprised at not seeing any signs of either fire or breakfast.

“Well, this is very extraordinary,” she said, “I called the girl at six myself. What has she been doing ever since?”

Tom knew quite well, but chose to keep the information to himself; and Miss Warne hurried into the kitchen, where she found the missing breakfast spread out according to Keziah’s ideas of neatness, on the bare deal table.

"Shall I call papa?" asked Tom, who was hovering in the doorway.

He received, of course, no answer; and Miss Warne gravely asked Keziah what she thought all the other rooms were for if the meals were to be taken in the kitchen.

"I don't know, ma'am," returned Keziah, humbly; "we always take 'em in ours."

"Yes, because you have no other place. But now you must go and light a fire in the dining-room, and then I will show you how to set the breakfast."

But in the midst of the lesson Mr. Warne came down, and requested it might be put off to another day as he had no time to spare that morning. So everybody went to work with great energy, and in a very short time all was ready, and Miss Warne, looking sadly distressed and tired, took her place at the head of the table.

"I am very sorry," she said, "to have managed so badly, but I thought I could leave the breakfast to Keziah"—for the new name of Jane had been already given up as an impracticability; "it seemed such a very simple thing to get ready."

"Yes, to you; but Keziah, of course, can only follow out her ideas of things, and I expect you will find them rather peculiar."

"I dare say, but I must try to teach her better. She only undertook to do what she was told, which meant in her case what she was taught. I cannot blame the girl; it was my fault for not looking after her."

Mr. Warne sipped his tea for awhile in silence, and then said he was sorry he had brought his sister into such a sea of troubles.

"Oh, don't think of that," she replied; "I shall not mind if I can only be of service."

"Well, we must do all we can to help you," said Mr. Warne. "Do you hear, boys?"

They did, of course, but only Frank gave the expected, "Yes, papa." Willy and Tom rather enjoyed the troubles, and had no wish to see the end of them; Tom especially, who delighted in the opportunities for mischief and self-indulgence which they seemed likely to afford him. Besides, he had a suspicion that he was regarded as a part of them—one element of mischief whom it would be a good thing to put down at any cost; and under that view of the matter, Tom was determined to do battle for his own side, by which he meant his particular faults, as long as he could. It was not very heroic of him, to say the least of it, for Miss Warne, nervous and anxious, did not seem quite the right sort of person to contend with; but love of self blinded Tom, as it had others before him, and made him think it was a fine thing to fight for his rights with anybody. But fortunately for her own comfort, Miss Warne was entirely occupied with the difficulty in hand just then—how to get Keziah into better training, and knew nothing of what was passing in Tom's mind.

"Well, I'll take care, at all events, that nothing of this kind ever happens again," she said.



And to prevent the recurrence of a similar blunder, Miss Warne rose the next day at six o'clock, and went about the house in the dismal wintry twilight trying to initiate Keziah into every detail of her early morning work. Tom crept out of his warm bed to reconnoitre for a minute or two over the balustrade, and then went back to curl snugly down, and tell Charlotte that Aunt Janet would soon bring on another attack of rheumatism.

"Oh, I hope not," replied Charlotte; "you forget how bad it is to be laid up, Tom."

"Oh is it! I liked the measles and baked apples and jam a great deal better than lessons last winter, and shouldn't mind having them all over again."

"But measles and rheumatism are very different things, Tom. I'll go and see if I can help."

Charlotte dressed herself as quickly as she could and went downstairs, but only finding herself in the way, she came softly back again, and sat at the window reading until it was time to rouse Hetty.

However, Tom could not forget Aunt Janet's rheumatism. It would be so very nice to have her laid up, he thought. She would most likely be quite indifferent to all that went on in the household, and he, on his side, would see that she did not want for jam and baked apples. Altogether the arrangement would suit everybody exactly; and Aunt Janet, no doubt, would be glad of the rest, and enjoy herself extremely. However, her health still held out though the early work was kept up

for some time longer—a necessary precaution against the new maid's tendency to blundering. Mr. Warne advised her being left to her own devices till the mornings got lighter, but Miss Warne, who saw decided signs of improvement in Keziah, meant to follow them up, hoping in the end to make a good servant of her.

"And when you have done that you will deserve a medal," said Mr. Warne, "for I never knew a Dempsey that could be made anything of yet."

"Perhaps because they have never had much pains spent upon them," said Miss Warne.

"Well, not of the patient kind that you are disposed to give, certainly. And Keziah does seem to be making some sort of progress, I must allow."

"Shall I give her some lessons, aunt?" asked Charlotte.

"What in, my dear?"

"Oh, the things I used to teach Nancy, and they did her so much good."

But the effect not having been very lasting, it was thought better to put off all attempts for Keziah's benefit in that way, at all events for a time. And Charlotte was not altogether sorry that her services were declined, for, notwithstanding Keziah's improvement in many ways, Charlotte had not yet grown to like her. It was the consequence, no doubt, of her prejudice against the Dempseys, and, thinking it unchristian-like, she tried hard to overcome it. Tom was the only one in the house

who thoroughly approved of Keziah, and his liking, it is to be feared, only proceeded from the amusement her blunders afforded him; and he declared that she was worth fifty Nancies, and that he never wanted her to go away.

"Nor do I, Tom," said Charlotte, "because it would not be right, I suppose; but I should be very glad to have Nancy back."

Charlotte was beginning to feel a little anxious about her old pupil, just then, and to wonder how she was going on. She had left them nearly a fortnight, and they had seen nothing of her, except a passing glimpse twice at church, when she looked rather pale and sorrowful. Parting with Nancy, badly as she had behaved, had been a great trial to Charlotte. She had lived at the vicarage all through Mrs. Warne's illness, and, though she had gone sadly astray in many ways since, she was still in some respects trustworthy, and certainly attached to them all.

"I wonder if she keeps up her lessons, Tom," said Charlotte.

"I should think not, now she isn't obliged to—who would?" However, being very fond of paying visits, Tom readily fell in with Charlotte's proposition that they should go one day to the Turners' cottage to see.

So the next time they went into the town together Charlotte bought a copy-book, thinking Nancy's old one might be quite filled up, and called in at the Turners' on their way back. They found

Nancy working hard at her lace pillow—an employment that did not suit her probably so well as active service, for some of her superabundant plumpness was gone, and the self-willed look in her face a little softened down.

“It’s very kind of you to come and see me,” she said, “and more than I deserve after being so bad and ungrateful.”

“Never mind, Nancy; it can’t be helped now,” replied Charlotte, “and we’ve all been very sorry to lose you.”

“Not so sorry as I’ve felt at leaving, miss. I haven’t done much else but grieve about it ever since,” and Nancy’s tears, which were generally very near the surface, began to flow freely.

“We have brought you a copy-book,” said Charlotte, thinking that might comfort Nancy. “I hope you haven’t given up your lessons.”

“Oh no, Miss Charlotte, I like ’em too well for that! Ben and me do ’em of an evening, and they make the time pass so pleasant that sometimes father stays at home to look on.”

Charlotte was glad to hear that, for she knew that Nancy’s father was very much given to spend his evenings at the public-house.

“But sometimes we sadly want you to help us, Miss Charlotte,” said Nancy with a sigh. “And now I suppose you’re teaching Keziah.”

“No, I am not, Nancy. Papa and Aunt Janet thought it might only interfere with her work—make her do it badly, I mean.”

"Ah, but it wouldn't, Miss Charlotte, not if they was right lessons like yours. People who have never had any teaching only think about what they've got to eat and to wear; and such thoughts as them don't help you over your work nor make it pleasant, but the lessons do."

Charlotte hoped that Tom, who was not very eager to avail himself of his educational advantages, was listening; but his mind was intent on Keziah's last blunder, just then, which was forthwith detailed for Nancy's amusement.

"Never mind, if she doesn't do any worse than that, Master Tom," replied Nancy; "but the Dempseys never was a sharp lot, and I'm afraid Miss Warne will have some trouble before she'll make anything out of Keziah."

"And we don't want her to," said Tom, who had no desire for Keziah's improvement, "we like her best as she is."

Charlotte said that was very wrong, but Tom, of course, could not be brought to see it; and Nancy remarked that she was afraid Tom would have his wish, as not one of the Dempseys had grown any better yet that she had ever heard of, though more money and trouble had been spent on them than on any other family in the parish.

Then Nancy got out her brothers' copy-books, of which she was not a little proud, and Tom marvelled greatly at the abundance of flourishes in Ben's.

"Mustn't he have been fond of doing it," said

Tom, "to stroke and curl his words about like that!"

"Yes, fonder than you are, I am afraid," said Charlotte, with a sigh.

This was a topic Tom had no wish to pursue, and so he said he thought it was time to go. A drizzling rain had been falling at intervals all the afternoon, but it had come on more steadily while they were at the Turners', and the wind was getting so boisterous that Tom found, to his great satisfaction, that he could not hold up his umbrella against it.

"I say," he said, "here's fun! It'll be inside out before we're half-way home."

But in that case, Charlotte thought, it would be best not to open the umbrella at all. Tom had nothing on to spoil, she said, and she could wrap one end of her shawl over her hat. So in that style they started, keeping up against the strong gusts of wind as well as they could, and Tom, half opening his umbrella every minute that he might have the pleasure of feeling it nearly wrenched out of his hands. It somehow happened that such windy days were sure to remind him of Joe Purkiss, and as they came to the end of Spring Lane, he proposed their turning down it, with a view, of course, to paying a visit midway.

"But it's so far round, Tom," objected Charlotte.

However, the question was settled by the wind suddenly taking Tom's cap off, and sending it

spinning down Spring Lane, when there was nothing for him to do but to run after it. Charlotte followed at full speed, and they were half-way down the lane before the cap was captured and on Tom's head again. It was no use to think of going back then, and so they plodded on through the mud, which was generally pretty thick in Spring Lane, till the old farmhouse was reached. It looked very dismal that afternoon, with its dark side turned to the lane, and the tall poplars round it, keeping up a dreary chorus, as they swayed to and fro in the wind.

"I expect it was just such a night as this when he went off," said Tom.

Charlotte said she hoped not, as she glanced up, with a shiver, at the window. Then she waited outside the gate while Tom went round to the other side of the house to ascertain, by a peep through the window, whether Farmer Purkiss were at home—a necessary precaution, as he would not have been likely to give him much of a welcome.

"All right," squeaked Tom, the next minute, and the two children went softly along the stone passage into the old farmhouse kitchen. They found Mrs. Purkiss sitting by the fire with her knitting in her lap, just as they had seen her last, but looking paler and sadder than usual; her thoughts probably travelled in the same direction as Tom's on stormy afternoons. She did not seem at all surprised at the sight of her visitors. Tom was apt to look in when wind and rain were busy

outside, to dry his jacket at her fireside, and talk over the probable return of the absent Joe. So he fell to both occupations at once with great zest, while Charlotte sat looking on from the depths of the farmer's chair opposite, and thinking what a pity it was Joe had not stayed at home to comfort his mother.

"The time's coming round again now when he went off, you know," said Tom.

"Yes, it's seven years ago, the 31st of next March," returned Mrs. Purkiss; "but that's nothing, Master Tom."

But Tom was of a different opinion. He thought that if Joe Purkiss ever did come back, it would be on the very month and day on which he went away; and he favoured Mrs. Purkiss with his views on that point as emphatically as if she had never heard them before.

"Oh, I don't expect he'll trouble himself about that, Master Tom. But there's one thing I have thought of."

"And what's that?" asked Tom.

"Why, about his birthday. It will be the 10th of October, and then I'm sure if he's alive he'll think of me. He'll be twenty-one then, and I don't know how it is, but from the first it's the time I've fixed on as likely to bring him back. When it came round more than six months after he was gone, and I sat thinking of him all alone, like to-night, I said to myself—'This day seven years my boy will be twenty-one, and if he's alive then I

know he'll think of me, and want to come back,' and I'm sure of it still."

Poor Mrs. Purkiss's voice nearly failed her as she uttered the last words, and Charlotte held up her finger as a hint to Tom to keep quiet for a minute; but small boys are not troubled with much delicacy respecting other people's feelings, and Tom, besides, was busy working out a fresh theory about the probable time of Joe Purkiss's return.

"Suppose he were to start on the 31st of next month, then," he said at last, "he might get back by October if he were ever so far off, and then he'd be right both ways."

"Yes, Master Tom," returned Mrs. Purkiss, sadly, "he'd be right come when he would. But sometimes I'm afraid he started years ago, and never got back after all. People have done so often and often, and then their friends have gone on looking and waiting all the same. And that's the hard part of it, Master Tom—the watching and waiting, and never knowing what's come of 'em."

"But the Lord knows, Mrs. Purkiss," said Charlotte.

It was the first time she had ever ventured to speak to Mrs. Purkiss in any way about her absent son, and the poor mother seemed a good deal struck by it.

"Yes, Miss Charlotte," she said, solemnly, "that's true—the Lord knows what's come of all the lost ones, and I'll try to bear it in mind better. But perhaps if I knew of a Bible verse that said it

quite plain I could stay my mind on it with a firmer trust."

Charlotte could not remember any just then, but she was sure there must be one, and said she would ask her papa for it and bring it round the next day. Then they took their leave of Mrs. Purkiss, and splashed through the mire of Spring Lane as fast as they could. But it was raining heavily by that time, and the wind still objected as strongly as ever to the opening of the umbrella, so that when they reached the vicarage door, Tom and Charlotte presented a most forlorn appearance. Unfortunately Miss Warne let them in, candle in hand, and having a great horror of rain herself, she asked them in much consternation where they had been.

"Paying visits," replied Tom.

"But I think you might have found better weather for it."

"Oh no, a wet day is just the time to find people at home." And Tom went in to dry his clothes, with the idea that he was much too clever a lad to be called on to give an account of himself under any circumstances, or even to take the trouble to be civil.

CHAPTER IX.

THE first time she was alone with her papa, Charlotte asked him, as she had promised, for some Bible verse for Mrs. Purkiss to rest her anxiety on about her son.

"Read her the parable of the 'Lost Sheep,'" replied Mr. Warne.

"But is that a promise, papa?"

"Yes, I think so; it is the assurance of our Lord himself of his special care for lost wanderers."

"And is there anything I can say about it, papa?"

"No; it is so plain that you had better let the words speak for themselves."

And Charlotte found her papa was right. Mrs. Purkiss listened to the parable with trembling eagerness, and seemed to find in it all she needed.

"'Layeth it on his shoulders rejoicing,'" she repeated, softly. "Yes, I can trust my poor lamb to the Good Shepherd, and if He sees fit, I don't doubt He'll bring him back to me again. But any way He will take him safely home and me too."

So having comforted Mrs. Purkiss, Charlotte's next care was about Nancy. Her words, "We sometimes want you sadly, miss, to help us," were often on her mind; and at last she asked her papa if she might go to the Turners on one or two evenings in the week to assist Nancy and her brothers over their lessons.

"Well, I am afraid it would hardly seem a very prudent undertaking, Charlotte."

"Not if I took Tom with me, papa?"

"No; and I rather doubt his adding to its respectability."

"But it seems hard that they should be trying to get on, and have no one to help them."

"So it does, Charlotte, and I'll see what can be done."

And in the course of the day Mr. Warne asked Frank if he would go.

"If you desire it, papa," replied Frank.

"I don't *desire* it, Frank; I wish you to do as you please."

"Then I'll try to give an evening now and then, papa, if I can spare it."

"'Now and then,' means no time, Frank. If you give but half an hour a week, have a fixed time, and keep to it."

"Won't it be an odd thing to do, papa?" asked Frank, who seemed to think that acting as private tutor to the Turners would be rather below his dignity.

"Not at all. And if you can make the lessons

profitable enough to get a few other boys to join them, the work will soon be taken out of your hands."

"How do you mean, papa?"

"Why, I was speaking to Brown, the school-master, the other day, about his opening a night-school, which is much wanted in the village; and he said that if he had half a dozen boys to begin with, he would do it to-morrow. You must see if you can make up the half-dozen for him, Frank."

So seeing a purpose in the work beyond the special improvement of Ben and Nancy Turner, Frank agreed to take it up and devote to it an hour twice a week. And Tom, who never liked to be left out of anything, of course volunteered to accompany him.

"There was nothing to stay at home for now," he said, "that he knew of, so he might as well go out."

The evenings had not been so pleasant, certainly, since Miss Warne's coming. There had been no cosy drawing round the fire after tea with a nice book or game; but that was perhaps more the children's fault than hers. The three elder ones were still shy of her, the result, in a great measure, of their country breeding; and Tom, though not troubled with diffidence, had his own reasons for being unsociable. So Miss Warne, when her day's labour was over with Keziah, generally sat by the fire with her work or book, while the rest busied themselves quietly in far-off corners; Tom taking

great pains to make his discomfort as plain as possible to the rest of the party. Hetty was the only one who manifested a desire to bring things back to their former pleasant footing.

"Papa," she said, climbing on Mr. Warne's knee, one evening, "you never tell us any stories, now."

"Because you don't ask me, I suppose. I never draw upon my stores in the story line unsolicited."

"But why don't they ask you; is it because Aunt Janet does not like them?"

"Oh no, Hetty," said Miss Warne, "I always like stories when they are good ones."

"And papa's always are," said Hetty. "Tell her one, papa, and then she will see."

"And what is it to be about?" asked Mr. Warne.

"Oh, some one very wise and good, papa."

"But that might not please everybody, Hetty, especially Tom, who likes foolish folks best, I'm afraid."

"Oh, but that is very naughty of him, papa, because he oughtn't to unless they are good as well, like old Giles. I don't like foolish people at all."

"Then suppose, to please you both, we take the two sorts, and have one wise and the other foolish."

Hetty thought that would do very well, and Mr. Warne said he should begin with the foolish one, though he was not entitled in the proper order of things to come first.

"But this one was so very foolish," continued Mr. Warne, "that once when he longed for something he could not get, he took to his bed, and made himself ill about it."

Hetty thought that even she should not have been silly enough for that, and supposed it was when he was a very little boy.

"No, he was old enough to know better, but I am afraid that the 'multitude of years' do not always teach wisdom. And he did a great many other wrong things, more than I can tell you about now; but perhaps the worst of all was that when troubles came upon him as a punishment for his sins, he laid the blame of them all on somebody else—on the wise man, Hetty, whom he did not happen to like at all."

"Oh, why not, papa? It's nicer to be wise than foolish."

"Well, I believe it is; but some people cannot keep their wisdom to themselves, and then it is tiresome to other folks, who prefer to be let alone, and have things all their own way. They don't like to be told that this or that naughty habit had better be given up, and soon vote their wise teachers great nuisances, whom it would be a relief to be rid of altogether."

"Ah, then they don't want to learn," said Hetty, who recollected that she had made considerable progress since giving in to "Mother Crabsticks."

"No, not any good, I am afraid. They prefer to keep their bad ways at any price, like the foolish man in my story, who hunted his wise teacher about

from place to place, thinking that if he could only catch him, and put him to death, things would go on better with him."

"Oh dear, I don't like him at all," said Hetty. "I hope he lived a long while ago."

"Yes, he did. And you will be glad to hear that the wise man escaped from him, and that the Lord took him to Himself at last in a chariot of fire."

"Ah, that's not a story, papa," said Hetty, finding herself suddenly on well-known ground; "it's out of the Bible."

"And cannot you find stories there? I think I could—prettier ones than in any other book in the world. Besides, you said I was to tell a good story to-night, to please Aunt Janet."

"But this hasn't been a good one, papa; I haven't liked it."

"Not a pleasant one altogether, Hetty, certainly; but I think we may learn something from it, if we try. Let us see. Here was Ahab loving his own ways, and falling into trouble in consequence; and Elijah, self-denying and persecuted, but promoted at last to great honour by the Lord he had served on earth. Perhaps we can each apply the lesson further to ourselves by a verse from Scripture. Aunt Janet, will you begin?"

"'The wise shall inherit glory; but shame shall be the promotion of fools,'" said Miss Warne, after a moment's thought.

"And will you give us a text, Frank?"

"On what, papa?" asked Frank, looking up from his book.

The matter was explained to him, when he replied promptly—

"'He that trusteth in his own heart is a fool; but whoso walketh wisely he shall be delivered.'"

Then Willy gave his verse, which was not quite so much to the purpose as it might have been; but when Tom's turn came, he had nothing to say at all.

"How is that?" said Mr. Warne. "I am afraid you have never thought about the danger of despising reproof, and preferring your own way to the Lord's, Tom."

Tom made no answer, and so Mr. Warne gave his verse: "He is in the way of life that keepeth instruction; but he that refuseth reproof, erreth," and told him to learn it, and repeat it to him the next day.

Tom, of course, had to promise obedience; but he did not like his task, and told Charlotte on the first opportunity that he supposed old Purkiss had brought all that on him.

"All what, Tom?"

"Why, the story and the text. It's very hard that people can't let you alone."

And so when the next evening came, and Frank reluctantly put away his books to go to the Turners', Tom joined in the expedition with great satisfaction.

They found everything nicely prepared for them. There was a clean kitchen, books and maps in abun-

dance, procured from the school, and the pupils themselves in neat trim and eager for work. Tom, having no special part to take in the proceedings, had a snug seat at the fire by the side of old Dame Turner, where he could look on at his ease. Of course there was plenty to amuse him. Frank's bashfulness at first, which was rather out of place, Tom thought, in a teacher, and the awkward blunders of the pupils; but gradually, as the little party grew more accustomed to each other, they got on better. The second evening a fresh pupil was added to the class—Nancy's father, who had at first borne his wife and Tom company at the fireside, but being led to admit that he could only read a little—just a word here and there—Frank proposed that he should draw up to the table, and take his turn at the book with the rest.

"No, no, Master Frank, thank you all the same," replied Turner; "but I expect it's too late for me to begin now."

"Papa says it's never too late to begin a good work," said Frank.

"And I shall have the boys laughing at me."

"No, you won't, father," said Ben, glancing up from his book; "we shan't have time."

"Shan't you?" said Turner, thoughtfully. "Then if you're in such a hurry, my boy, I guess I'd better look sharp, too." And he took his place beside Ben, and kept it from that evening with great satisfaction to himself and every one else.

But there the class stood still for awhile, num-

bering, as Tom said, really only two, as Nancy and her father could hardly be counted ; and so four more scholars had to be found before it could be given over to the legitimate keeping of Brown the schoolmaster. But Tom was in no hurry for that time to come. The two days on which the class was held were to him the golden ones of all the week. Running out in the bleak March evenings, often through the splashing rain, and then sitting in the warm chimney corner to listen to old Mat Turner's blunders or quiz what Tom privately designated "Master Frank's grand teacher airs," was delightful, and Tom, who made a point of studying himself before any one else, did not scruple, when the opportunity came, to throw a hindrance in the way of the first volunteer's admission to the class.

"Please, sir," said an elder brother of Johnny Barker's, one day when Tom was idling in the village, "I hear there's some teaching going on of an evening up at the Turners' ; can't I join it ?"

"I don't know. It's Master Frank's business ; you must ask him."

"And when had I better come ?"

"Oh, I don't know ; he's over his lessons just now, and won't like to be disturbed. Suppose you leave it for a day or two."

So Will Barker did leave it, and, as Tom expected, nothing more was heard of him. However, other boys applied, and at the end of the third week Frank's class had a sudden increase that raised its number to five. Tom could have supplied the sixth

directly if he had chosen, but he did not, though his conscience sometimes reproached him for the omission. But Tom's conscience had become too heavily burdened a receptacle lately to be much inconvenienced by little additional weights. When his faults had brought on him a few sorrowful words from his mother, he used to be a little watchful over them, but since her influence had been withdrawn there had been a great change in him, which was more perceptible of course to every one else than himself. His papa, Tom could not help owning in a condescending sort of way, had a right to correct him, but he could not see what business Farmer Purkiss or Aunt Janet had to interfere; and so he took great pleasure in resisting both, and indulging in any bad habits they particularly disliked.

"You think you're fighting a brave battle, don't you?" said Farmer Purkiss to Tom one Sunday afternoon, as he followed him out of school.

"Who with?" asked Tom.

"Why, me and everybody else who tries to teach you any good. But I think it's a very dismal one, and that you'll get the worst of it, as people always do when they don't fight in the right way."

Tom grinned, and thought he should like to know the farmer's idea of the right way of fighting, and presently Master Purkiss obliged him.

"If our soldiers in the battle of Waterloo had turned round on their commanders you wouldn't have thought 'em a brave set would you?"

"Why, no," replied Tom, though he did not

exactly see what that question had to do with the matter.

"Then it is not the mere fact of fighting that makes heroes of us. The grand thing to begin with, I suppose, is to find the right enemies to hit at. And when we don't do that," pursued the farmer, lifting his stick at Tom in rather an alarming manner, "all the rest goes wrong, and we find in the end that we've been cowards and blunderers all our lives. Now, did you ever sit quietly down and ask yourself who it was you'd best fight with?"

"Oh, yes," replied Tom, thinking that, so far as the choice of enemies was concerned, he had shown considerable sagacity.

"And the answer that came, perhaps, was 'Farmer Purkiss;' but you made a mistake. The right enemy to hit at was nearer home."

"Who? Aunt Janet?" asked Tom.

"Oh! she's one of 'em, is she? No, I don't mean her. The enemy's nearer to you still; it's *self*, Master Tom, and till you begin to take that in hand, I don't see how you're to be much of a hero."

"Don't you?" said Tom, grinning again, for Willy was walking by his side, and he did not like to get the worst of an argument before him. "I'm not going to be silly enough to fight with myself; it would be three against one."

"How do you make that out?" asked the farmer.

"Why, there's you and Aunt Janet already,

that's two, and if I joined in that would make three ; and three against one isn't fair, you know."

" Ah, you think yourself a sharp lad, don't you," said the farmer, as Tom and Willy chuckled together ; " but it wouldn't be three against one to my way of reckoning, for if you took yourself in hand, me and Miss Warne would give in, and there'd be an end of the battle." And the farmer turned off towards Spring Lane, having had, to Tom's great annoyance, the last word, and certainly the best of the argument.

" Ah, he's in a rage because I got up a little fun in school this afternoon," said Tom, stopping at the stile to look after Master Purkiss. " But what's the use of sitting straight and stiff staring at him all the time ?"

" Well, it would be better than making fun, perhaps," replied Willy, who, though not by any means a good boy himself, thought that Tom went a little too far sometimes.

" Oh, would it ! I say, did you see Aunt Janet trying to teach this afternoon ?"

" No," replied Willy, who was in Mr. Warne's class. " How can I ever see anything when papa never lets us turn our heads ?"

" Ah, then you lost a treat. She took up her skirts on both sides, of course, in case they should get in a mess, and put on her spectacles to find her place ; and then, when she looked up all ready to begin, there was Sarah Sykes opposite with her skirts pinned up, a bit of stick balanced on her nose,

and her face drawn down just like Aunt Janet's. You should have seen her, it was fun ! and all the girls in the class were laughing, but I expect Aunt Janet didn't like it."

"I expect not," said Willy. "What did she say?"

"Well, I couldn't hear, because old Purkiss was thundering away so ; but she rustled her skirts, and got very angry. Two teachers in a class, you know, was one too many, and so, of course, they fell out."

"And which got the best of it?"

"Oh, Sarah Sykes, I expect, for she was on the grin all through the lesson, and didn't give up anything—but the bit of stick on her nose, and that was because there was no getting it to hold. I say, her brother Reuben sits right in front of old Purkiss ; wouldn't it be fun to get him to smuggle a stick into school next Sunday, and a pair of spectacles that *would* keep on, and there'd be another class with two teachers in it. How we should get on !"

"I don't think you would, Tom," said Willy, "especially if it came to papa's ears, or Frank's. What would they say?"

"Oh dear, if we were always to bother ourselves about such things as that, we should never have any fun at all."

But in Willy's eyes such proceedings were rather doubtful fun. Willy was too much with Frank not to be a little influenced by him, and Tom, who had lately begun to associate a good deal with Reuben Sykes—a younger brother of that unhappy Roger,

who had been taken away in the midst of a very vicious course—was getting far beyond Willy in hardened love of mischief. But Willy, besides not having much steadiness of character, had not either Frank's or Tom's abilities, and so he was apt to be led by either in turn.

"I wouldn't have anything to do with the Sykeses," he said, as the two boys kept on their way homewards. "They're a bad lot." But his protest against them was a very feeble one; and by the time they reached home, his curiosity to see how Miss Warne would look after her afternoon's work at the school was as keen as Tom's.

Unfortunately Mr. Warne was visiting a sick person at a farm-house some distance off, where he proposed taking a cup of tea before returning for the evening service; and the little party at the vicarage took their places round the table without the wholesome restraint of his presence.

"Will you cut the bread and butter, Charlotte?" said Miss Warne, "I am a little tired."

"Yes, aunt," replied Charlotte; and Tom and Willy telegraphed their satisfaction at the effect of Sarah Sykes's afternoon performance by kicks under the table.

"I think the children were more tiresome than usual to-day, aunt," said Charlotte; "I don't know when we have had such a noisy school."

"We'd such a lot of teachers," said Tom.

"There was only one more than usual, I think," said Miss Warne, gravely.

"Oh, wasn't there? we thought there were two," said Tom, urged on by a fresh kick from Willy under the table.

"Perhaps you mean Sarah Sykes, Tom," replied Miss Warne, "and fancy that her bad behaviour this afternoon was a very amusing exhibition. But you would not have seen it, if you had been attending to what was going on in your own class."

"But there wasn't anything. Old Purkiss was looking for his place, and couldn't find it."

"No, because he had too many naughty boys at the same time probably to attend to. I suppose you are the Sarah Sykes of your class, Tom, and think it an honourable distinction."

Tom did not deny the imputation; and proceeded to dispose of his bread and butter with considerable relish, thinking he had shown a great deal of spirit, and afforded entertainment for everybody round the table except his Aunt Janet. But his satisfaction did not last long. As he held out his hand for his cup of milk and water he was greatly surprised at receiving a quiet order to leave the room.

"What for?" asked Tom.

"I do not think I need answer that question, Tom. But I wish you to understand once for all, that if I put up with impertinence from Sarah Sykes, who has probably never been taught better, I don't intend to take it from you, so you will leave your tea till I have finished mine."

Tom stared, but did not attempt to move; and

Frank looked up from his book to see what was the matter.

"Oh, pray go, Tom," said Charlotte, almost crying, "you know you have been very naughty, and perhaps Aunt Janet will let me bring your tea to you."

"Oh, certainly," replied Miss Warne, "but I cannot have him take it with me." And Tom, not knowing in the least how it came about, was so awed by the steady look of Miss Warne's eyes, that he gave way, and left the room.

Willy was disposed to rebel, but Frank having returned to his book, and Charlotte looking very much distressed, he saw he should get no support from either, and left Tom to fight his own battles. Tom was, no doubt, quite able and ready to do that, but Miss Warne probably did not find the skirmishing so pleasant. She took her tea with a sad, weary face, and when Mr. Warne came in from the evening service he found her looking thoroughly exhausted.

"I am afraid your day's work has been too much for you, Janet," he said; "Mrs. Elder told me the girls in your class were behaving very ill this afternoon."

"Some of them did," replied Miss Warne, "but I must expect that sometimes."

"Yes, I am afraid so, especially while you have Sarah Sykes to deal with. Perhaps it would be as well to make an example of her, and two or three other naughty ones, by turning them out of the

school altogether. But I am loth to shut a door of improvement against any one."

"Yes, I should be sorry for you to do that. Leave her to me, and I'll see what I can do with her."

"In addition to the two you have on your hands already," said Mr. Warne, "Tom and Keziah? I am afraid you are undertaking more than you can manage."

"No, I do not think I am ; at least I hope not. One ought not to shrink from any duty."

"Certainly not ; but I don't know that undertaking the reformation of about the worst trio in Cumberstone is exactly your duty. Bridget would not allow it if she were here, especially if she saw you looking so very unfit for the task as you do now. I should have her carrying you off bodily by the first train to-morrow."

"But I do not think I should go," returned Miss Warne ; "for I dare say I shall like my work after a while, and get on better. But it is a little difficult at first. Children are so slow to see that correction is good for them."

"And so are grown-up folks, I am afraid," said Mr. Warne. "We are an untractable lot at the best, but our Great Teacher 'fainteth not, neither is weary.' It is an unspeakable comfort to me to remember that, when I get out of heart with myself and everybody else."

And so Mr. Warne and his sister talked on at the close of their hard Sunday's work, full of love

even for the naughty ones about them, and longing to do them good ; while Tom in his small bed upstairs, to which he had retired before his time in high dudgeon, fancied they were discussing his faults in particular, and laying atrocious plans for their punishment.

"It's a fine thing to be grown up," he remarked to Charlotte, when she made her appearance in the room a little later.

"Why, Tom?" asked Charlotte, who had some doubts on that head.

"Oh, to have everything your own way, and be able to bother other folks."

By "other folks," Tom probably meant himself, but Charlotte said she did not think that grown people possessed the special privileges Tom had mentioned, or that it would be very pleasant if they did.

"Oh, wouldn't it," replied Tom ; "you'll see !"

He was referring, perhaps, to that time, a little distant as yet, when Charlotte would be able to judge for herself. But she was a little burdened already with the cares that were troubling her papa and aunt downstairs, and had no expectation that added years would lighten them. There were her own faults to correct, she reflected, as she laid her head on her pillow, and Tom's and Hetty's. Then her thoughts wandered away to one or two naughty ones in her class at school, and to Nanny Sparks, who was so eager to have every division of the sermon, but did not take it to heart, Charlotte was

afraid, so deeply as she ought to. It was a little bewildering, and so Charlotte gave it all up at last, with other anxieties, to be ordered for her, and went to sleep thinking what a good thing it was that everybody in the world, grown up and small, could do the same.

CHAPTER X.

As time passed, and Frank's class at the Turners' did not seem likely to get beyond five, Mr. Warne began to think it had better be transferred to the school-room, without waiting any longer for the sixth scholar.

"Let us have another week or two, papa," said Frank. "I should like to make the full number up."

"Very well, if you really try to do so I have no objection; but I cannot have you showing any favour."

"But I don't, papa; every boy who has applied has been admitted at once."

"Then there has been a mistake elsewhere, for I certainly heard that some applicant had been a little uncivilly dismissed."

"Not by me, papa," said Frank.

And Tom, who was standing by, was seized with a sudden interest in the sparrows outside the window.

"Do you know anything about it, Tom?" asked Mr. Warne.

But Tom did not find it convenient to answer. Sauntering up the lane was Will Barker himself, and the sight to a guilty conscience was rather alarming. What if he should come in, Tom thought, and a little explanation ensue? But Will kept on past the gate, and Tom turned round again, with his hands in his pockets, as self-confident as ever. However, by that time Mr. Warne's question had been passed on to Willy, and the matter dismissed as a false report, such things not being rare in Cumberstone.

But a day or two after, Will Barker renewed his application, and happening fortunately to make it in the right quarter this time, it became evident, even to Tom, that the class must soon be put under the schoolmaster's care. But of course neither scholars nor teacher quite liked the coming separation, and old Mat declared that it would put an end to his studies at once.

"But you can go on just the same at the school," said Frank.

"Oh no, I couldn't, sir. Having a lesson at one's own fireside, and being stuck up in a class is two different things. I couldn't stand that."

"Then it'll be the 'Plough' again of an evening, I expect, Mat," said his wife.

"Well, what's a man to do? If I could read my paper at home, perhaps I shouldn't care to go out and hear it."

"I could read it for you, father," said Nancy.

"Oh yes, you'd soon tire of that, and mother

'ud fidget at seeing the work at a standstill. Beside, what I wanted was to be able to spell it out for myself a bit. There's nothing like that!"

"I'm sorry too, sir," said Ben. "Learning up at the school won't get us on as it does here."

"But Brown is a good teacher," said Frank.

"Yes, sir, only he keeps us in order so. I suppose he's obliged to, but one does want to ask a question sometimes."

Then they set to work, reading and sums coming first, in which Nancy took a part; and when they were over she went back to her lace pillow, leaving the table free for her brothers' more advanced studies, and to Ben's questions, which came pretty fast on each other, and caused his father sometimes to stare at him in open-mouthed wonder.

"Why, here's a boy wanting to know why the clouds are always emptying themselves and always full; and as soon as he's satisfied about that he goes off to what Master Frank calls the moon's '*faces*.' Why, when I was a boy, and folks told me there was a hungry fellow of a giant always biting a bit off for his dinner, I was satisfied, and didn't trouble myself any more about it."

"But how did they account for it's getting bigger, father?" asked Ben.

"Oh, *account*, Ben! Nobody ever thought of doing that about anything. They'd just give you an answer, and it had to do whether it fitted in with things or no. Boys didn't look for long-winded explanations then as they do now. I don't

wonder that the master has to keep order and snub the questions, or you'd soon carry him clean off his standing ground."

"If you mean puzzle him," said Frank, "I don't suppose he'd care about that. I often ask papa questions that he can't answer."

"Do you now?" said Turner, "but I expect he takes care not to let you see it."

"Oh no, he doesn't," returned Frank; "if it's anything he can find out in books we hunt it out together; and if not, he tells me that it must be set aside as one of the many things that will be made plain to us hereafter."

"Well to be sure!" said Turner, "then there are some questions in the world that nobody can't answer."

He seemed to take great comfort from that discovery, and thought it over leisurely as he smoked his evening pipe. Then when the work was done, and all Ben's difficulties solved for awhile, Mat thanked Master Frank warmly for the pains he had taken with them, and said he was only sorry "they'd got so near the end of it all."

So was Frank, and he plodded home full of troubled thoughts. Though he had spoken hopefully of the teaching his little class would receive from the schoolmaster, he did not feel at all satisfied about it. Only a few weeks before he had been very unwilling to take the work up, but now, having begun it, he was thoroughly interested, and did not like the idea of relinquishing it. However, having

made up the number, there was no further excuse for retaining it, only, as he told his papa the next time the matter was discussed between them, he was afraid the class would soon break up under Brown's dry, methodical teaching.

"Ah, they won't get things quite so much their own way, I dare say," replied Mr. Warne. "But I'm no despiser of the 'dry, methodical style,' Frank; it does as much in a quiet way, perhaps, as the grand excursive one."

"I hope you don't mean that as my way, papa," said Frank, colouring.

"No, I wasn't thinking of any one's way in particular; but I would advise you not to fancy yours superior to other people's. It's a bad notion for a teacher to take up with at starting."

"But the boys say themselves, papa, that they don't think Brown's teaching will be as profitable to them as mine."

"No, for the reason I have given—that they will not be able to dart off into little discussions, right and left, as pupils have a fancy for, I have noticed, over their books. It is an exercise of the wits that has its advantages, no doubt, when kept in due bounds; but for the members of your class, especially old Mat, who cannot read as yet, I should advise sticking as closely as possible for awhile to the old system."

"Then you don't think I have been of any use to them, papa?" said Frank, a little sulkily.

"Yes I do, Frank; and to prove it, I am willing

for you to keep your work on a little longer if you wish it."

"Of course I do, papa. But I suppose I must give up to Brown now; it can't be helped."

"No; but you can do both—that is, make the class over to him, and still give it an evening or two in the week."

"But would not Brown think that interfering, papa?"

"No, not at all. He is hard worked enough during the day, and will be glad to give up his place to you as often as you can take it; only have regular evenings still for the work, or your help will do no good to either master or boys."

"Yes, papa; I can keep to the same days—Monday and Thursday—if it suits Brown."

So the matter was settled, greatly, of course, to Frank's satisfaction; and he looked forward impatiently for the following Thursday to tell his good news at the Turners'. But in the meantime he managed to get a severe cold, and, as he did not choose to take the remedies prescribed by Miss Warne, it became so much worse that when the time arrived for going to the Turners', he was unable to move from the fireside. Brown, who would willingly have taken the class for him, was unavoidably absent; and so there was nothing to be done but to send Tom down to the Turners' to say that there would be no teaching that evening.

At least that was the errand on which Tom started; but when he reached the cottage, and saw

all the class, old Mat included, seated round the table, things looked so inviting, that Tom dropped into the chair left vacant for the teacher, and announced that he had come in Frank's stead. There was an audible laugh from some of the boys, and Nancy looked rather incredulous; but old Mat patted him on the back, and said he guessed he'd do for *him*, and with that encouragement Tom set to work.

But a teacher who undertakes more than he can manage has not an easy time of it. Points on which he is sadly conscious of incapacity are sure to be attacked first; and Tom's arithmetical qualifications being anything but shining, a pile of slates containing sums prepared for Frank's correction, and which he would have set right at once, were thrust under Tom's nose to begin with. This was rather discomposing, but of course it would not do to make any undignified admission to that effect, and so Tom pretended to glance through one bewildering maze of figures, and then put the slates aside, saying he thought it would be best to look at them last.

"So it will, Master Tom," said old Mat, with a wink at the rest. "And if it's agreeable to the company, we'll begin with the reading; I guess that's what we shall make the best hand at to-night."

And so it proved. In the reading Tom could shine, and took care to do so as brilliantly as possible. Poor old Mat, instead of being allowed to plod on with his one-syllable book, was set to master words he had never heard of in his life, and so he had to get Tom, as he said, to tow him along—a

feat that Tom performed with such surprising rapidity, that when it was over, though he had scarcely read a word himself, Mat looked up quite bewildered and out of breath.

"Well now, if I'd know'd reading was anything like that," he said, "I don't think I should have had the heart to begin it."

Nancy glanced rather reproachfully at Tom, and the boys began to laugh again.

"I think, father," said Ben, "that you'd best keep to your own book."

"Perhaps I had; that is, if Master Tom ain't above looking a little word in the face."

Having had his grand show-off, Tom condescended to say that he was not; and then the reading went on for awhile round the table in such an orderly way that Tom quite regretted Frank was not by to see it. How they were taking his lengthy absence at home, he was far too pleasantly engaged to consider.

But the reading could not go on for ever; and when it was at last finished, Tom, who was rather alarmed in case the moon should be brought under discussion again, or some other difficult matter on which he was not very well informed, proposed dictation with great promptness.

"But there's the sums, Master Tom," said Ben, with a grin; "we ain't got no slates till they're cleared off, you know."

"Then take paper," said Tom, who saw he was in a difficulty.

But there was no paper at hand, except in their copy-books, and this was too precious to be scribbled over.

"Never mind, boys," said old Mat, good-naturedly; "put the sums on. It'll do you good to go through 'em again."

So cuffs went to work on the slates, and there was a little chuckling during the process which Tom did not quite approve of: but Mat patted him on the back again, and told him there must be a beginning to everything, and that "he'd got on famous considerin'."

"Better than I could, Master Tom," he said, "even supposin' I know'd as much as you. But I guess such things come nat'ral to young gentlemen."

But a sad finale was to wind up Tom's first attempt at teaching. He had scarcely begun the dictation when the door behind him was quietly opened, and Mr. Warne entered the kitchen. Tom tried to slip out of his seat of honour unseen, but it was no use, he had been detected, and could, of course, expect nothing but disgrace and punishment.

"This is what I feared, Tom," said Mr. Warne, gravely; "you have been taking Frank's place. But I hope, at least, it has been understood on both sides that it was only done in fun."

But so far as Tom was concerned all had been sober earnest, and he could not even shelter himself under that excuse.

"But did he not give you Master Frank's message?" asked Mr. Warne of Mat.

"Well, he said something about him, sir," returned Mat, afraid to commit himself too far.

"Ah, I see," said Mr. Warne, "and for the future I must choose a more trustworthy messenger."

"Well, I don't know as he's so much to blame, sir; perhaps we led him ourselves into the error of thinking as he'd come in Master Frank's stead."

"But he knew very well that he had not," said Mr. Warne. "It's very good of you to try and shield him, Turner, but you must leave me to settle the matter with him as I think best."

"And you won't be too hard on him, sir, I hope," said Mat, whose own parental corrections were not of the tenderest kind. "I believe as the young master has been doing his best."

"No doubt; but as it was in a matter he ought to have let alone, I cannot see any merit in that. Now, Tom, put on your cap and come home with me."

But Mat being still fearful that the whole weight of Tom's wrong-doing would be visited on his back, which would certainly have been the case had the culprit been Ben or Ned, volunteered his company, as Mr. Warne and Tom started homewards.

"I like a bit of a walk of a evening, sir, if you don't object," he said.

"Certainly not," replied Mr. Warne. But Tom did greatly, feeling that going home under such a strong escort was very like being taken into

custody. However, old Mat clutched his hand in his hard friendly gripe, and the three started along the dark lane to the vicarage.

Very little was said by the way. Mr. Warne seemed vexed, and Mat was only intent on putting as favourable a colour on Tom's conduct as possible. But at the vicarage his good intentions were acknowledged by an invitation to go in.

"I have wanted to talk to you for some time, Turner," said Mr. Warne, kindly, "and we can do it better in my study, perhaps, than elsewhere."

Mat made no objection, though he was not, as he said, in a trim for visiting, and he followed Mr. Warne into the study, while Tom, considerably crestfallen, made his way to the dining-room. What was the subject of Mr. Warne's private conversation with Mat did not transpire; but it was a plain fact, patent to all the village, that he became, from that time, more regular in his attendance at church, and less given to spend his evenings at the "Plough"—a change he could only be led to account for by saying that he "wasn't one to go against them as did the right thing by his boys."

But when Mat was gone, and Mr. Warne came back to the dining-room, in which Tom was sitting awaiting his fate, there was a grave silence, and an awed look in Charlotte's face that seemed more dreadful to Tom than all the cuffs that were ever administered.

"Have you had your supper, Tom?" Mr. Warne asked, at length.

"No, papa ; I couldn't eat any."

"Then you had better go to bed at once, and we'll talk all this over to-morrow."

His papa had never spoken to him so gravely before, and Tom slunk away without a word to anybody, feeling himself, though he could not, as usual, see why, a culprit who was likely to be visited shortly with some kind of punishment.

CHAPTER XI.

TOM's ideas of right and wrong were, it is to be feared, sadly confused, for though he tried hard after he got to his bed, which felt unusually cold and comfortless that night, to find out why everybody was so angry with him, he could not succeed. It was not for staying out without leave, he argued, for he had often done that before without much being said about it ; nor for teaching people to read, for he was allowed to help Johnny Barker's grandmother through a chapter of the Bible whenever he pleased. Still, though he could not make out what it was, he felt sure there must have been something wrong in his conduct that evening, or his papa, who did not deal out justice in a very severe way, would not have been so excessively shocked at it.

Presently Charlotte came quietly in, and then Tom sat up in bed and asked her " what papa was so angry about ? "

" Oh, at your being so naughty, Tom. But don't talk of it now ; lie down again and try to go to sleep. "

"What's the good?" asked Tom, savagely.

Charlotte did not exactly know, except that being long past Tom's usual bedtime it seemed the right thing to do; and in order to assist him she put out her light, and crept in beside Hetty as quickly and noiselessly as she could.

But Tom was not to be sent to sleep against his will. The wind was raging furiously out of doors, and heavy splashes of rain came every now and then against the window—a state of things that he always found particularly favourable to meditation.

"I say, how it blows!" he remarked.

"Yes," answered Charlotte, with a shiver. "I hope there isn't anybody out in it."

"Oh, but there is—lots of people, and some of them at sea. Oh, wasn't that a blusterer! enough to lift a ship right up on its beam ends."

Charlotte made no answer, and Tom continued his meditations. An idea had suddenly suggested itself involving a difficult calculation, and when it was brought to a successful close, he started up in bed again, and roused Charlotte by a sudden twitch at her bedclothes.

"Well," she said, in some alarm, "what is it?"

"Why, the 31st of March—the day he went away, you know. I've been reckoning it up."

"Who went away?"

"Why, Joe Purkiss; it's seven years ago to-day. I wish I'd thought to run in to Mrs. Purkiss this evening, just to remind her of it."

"I don't think she was likely to forget it."

"No, I suppose not; and perhaps she's waiting for him now. I wonder which room she sits in when she expects him home. Do you think it's the one with the high window?"

"Oh no, Tom, I hope not; she would be so cold up there. But it's his birthday she's looking forward to for bringing him back, and I forget when that is."

"The 10th of October," replied Tom, promptly. "And if he doesn't come home then we shall have another whole year to wait."

Charlotte did not see why people who had run away were bound to come back on their birthdays, or the dismal anniversaries of their leaving their homes, but she was too tired to argue the point, and again advised Tom to go to sleep.

"And if I do," said Tom, "it will seem to be morning directly, and I don't know what. No, I'd rather lie and think; it's a deal the most comfortable."

But gradually the storm outside grew quieter, and in the lull that followed, Tom found it such a hard matter to keep awake, that at last he gave up trying altogether.

The next day, as he was in disgrace, was, of course, to be a very miserable one, and Tom got up prepared for any kind of fate.

"I wonder what I shall have," he said, as he brushed up his hair all the wrong way.

"Oh, nothing to mind much, I dare say. Papa never punishes us very severely."

"No, I wish he would. If he'd just thump into me, and have done with it, I shouldn't care half so much."

"I dare say that is why beating never does children any good," said Charlotte, meditatively.

"Oh dear! It does as much good as most things in the punishment way, I expect. But I don't see why we're to be worried for little things, when grown people can do just as they like."

Charlotte was too busy just then with Hetty's toilet to answer him; and so Tom went downstairs feeling very anxious to know what was to be done with him.

But breakfast passed quite peacefully, and Tom began to revive a little. His papa had had time to think the matter over, which was far the best way, was Tom's comfortable reflection; and now, instead of being angry, perhaps he was pleased with him, for having made himself so useful. So he got through his lessons pretty creditably with Charlotte, and then went with his "Delectus" into his papa's study. Everybody was, as usual, very busy there, and when Tom appeared Mr. Warne told him, without looking up, that he wanted him to find a word in the dictionary.

"Yes, papa," replied Tom, promptly, "what is it?"

"Impostor; and when you have found it, tell me the meaning."

"Yes, papa," and the next minute Tom read aloud, "'Impostor, one who cheats.'"

"Yes; do you quite understand what that means?"

"Oh, of course, papa. I know what a cheat is very well. Old Barnes is one when he tries to sell us his stale cresses for fresh."

"Exactly; then it is to pass off ourselves or our wares at a false value, and so deceive others. What do you think of such a proceeding, Tom?"

"I suppose it is very bad," replied Tom, hanging his head a little.

"Yes; but you must have had a different opinion about it last night, when you tried to pass yourself off on the Turners as a teacher capable of taking Frank's place."

"I only heard them read, papa, and gave them dictation."

"'Dictation,'" repeated Mr. Warne, gravely. "Let me see if you can spell the word accurate?"

Tom tried, but failed dismally.

"So you see you had better make a little progress yourself, Tom, before attempting anything of the kind again. And was that all you did, or rather made believe to do?"

"No, papa," Tom blurted out with a very red face, "I looked over a sum."

"And what rule was it in?"

Tom was obliged to confess he did not know, and had a hard matter to keep up what he supposed to be a valiant appearance of unconcern. To be put

through this examination with Frank and Willy looking on, was worse than anything he had expected.

"I am sorry you have proved yourself so utterly unworthy of trust, Tom," said Mr. Warne. "No doubt you thought it was very fine to pass yourself off for such a clever lad, but at the same time I dare say every one in the class was laughing at you. People are not so foolish as we sometimes suppose; and when such folks come forward as old Barnes with his stale cresses, or Tom Warne with his grand teacher airs, they detect the cheat at once, and despise the author of it. And now, Tom, I must give you some punishment to help you to remember this and be more honest for the future; and to show you that I have not quite lost all confidence in you, I will leave you to chose it yourself."

Tom thought for a minute. It must be something very bad, he supposed, or it would not do; and so, at last, with a great effort, he said that he would give up going to the evening teaching any more.

"Very well, Tom; but I don't wish you to give it up altogether, so suppose we say for the next four weeks."

"Thank you, papa," and Tom knew he was expected to consider the sentence a very lenient one, but of course he did not, and he sat down to his "Delectus" with a most forlorn aspect. And Mr. Warne on his side was but half satisfied with it. Tom's wrong-doings were beginning to give him a great deal of anxiety, and he was afraid that he did

not punish them with sufficient severity. But Tom was motherless, a sad fact that Mr. Warne in his tender love for him never forgot, and he hoped to bring the boy round to better things by gentle means.

But there was no doubt that, instead of improving, Tom was getting rapidly worse. Farmer Purkiss was constantly coming to Mr. Warne with bad accounts of him; and at last the old man's patience seemed quite worn out. The meditated joke of getting up a mock copy of the farmer in school-time had been carried out, and succeeded beyond the expectation of the plotters; but the satisfaction it gave did not extend far beyond themselves. Reuben had made a first-rate Farmer Purkiss, and had held up his stick at Tom in a way that was perfectly irresistible, but the sorrowful look of the old farmer himself had so touched the hearts of the other boys in his class that the expected demonstration of delight had not come, and Reuben's stick and spectacles were soon hidden away out of sight. Then the genuine stick, which it was hoped would have been put into exercise, still kept its place peaceably at the farmer's side, greatly to Reuben's disappointment, and the lessons went on just as usual.

But the truth was that the farmer was meditating a more efficacious way of dealing with his tormentors than using his stick on them; and early on Monday morning he found his way up to the vicarage. Everybody was very busy there of course, and both dining-

room and study were occupied, so the farmer was shown into the little state apartment, where he sat as far out of reach of the ornaments that abounded there as possible. His coming was of course known in the study, which commanded a good view of the garden gate, and Tom did not feel quite comfortable about it, but he promised to attend to his work while his papa was away, and Frank being present, who would not have appreciated Reuben's joke of the day before, he had to keep his word.

Mr. Warne's interview with the farmer lasted a long while. He had first to listen to his story, and then try to soothe his wounded feelings with the same kind of comfort that he was always glad to fly to himself. But the farmer had not come, as he sometimes did, for advice or sympathy. He simply wanted to tell his story, and speak his mind, and when the story was told, the second part of the business was got through in very few words.

"It's just come to this, sir," he said, "either I must give up the class or he must leave the school."

"Who, Reuben?"

"No, sir, Master Tom; he's the moving spirit in it all."

"But do you think he has had anything to do with this, Purkiss?"

"Yes, the worst, sir, the plotting of it. But I don't wish to force you to do what you mayn't think wise, and so, as I'm an old man, I can make that an excuse for giving up, and say nothing about the other."

"No, that isn't to be thought of, Purkiss. I must consider the school as well as Tom, and can't afford to lose a faithful teacher. But I should have been glad to use milder means if I could. Boys are naturally fond of mischief as you know."

"Yes, sir; but it isn't only love of mischief in Master Tom. He seems to me to be setting himself right against everything that's good."

"Oh, I hope not," returned Mr. Warne; but, as he thought about it, he could not help admitting to himself that Farmer Purkiss was very near the truth.

"I'd be the last to counsel harsh measures, sir," said the farmer, looking a little sadly at his stick, which was now, however, only used as a support, "for I've seen the evil of them; but I think going to the other extreme is quite as bad."

"There's no doubt it is, perhaps worse. But I can't quite make up my mind yet what to do with Tom. You must give me a day or two to think about it, and we'll talk it over again."

"Yes, sir, you'll do what's best I know. But it isn't only myself I'm thinking of—though I couldn't of course make up my mind to go on taking insults from the boys Sunday after Sunday—it's Master Tom as well. There's a good many among us as are never brought to see the evil of sin until we suffer for it, and I think he's one of them."

"I believe you are right," said Mr. Warne; "but then the suffering that you and I could inflict might only harden him."

"Yes, sir; there's always danger of that," replied the farmer; and then his thoughts went back to the mistake he had made with his own son.

"But I did it for the best, sir," he said, looking up from one of the long, sad pauses that Mr. Warne had learnt to understand.

"And therefore it will turn out for the best," said the Vicar. "We deal with a gracious Master who looks on our motives, and when they are right, prospers our work, however blunderingly we set about it."

"Well, I've long left the matter in His hands, sir, and in the next world I trust to find He has prospered it, but it's too late to look for any news of it in this."

"But your wife hasn't given up all hope, I think."

"No, sir; when Joe first went away she took a notion that he'd be back on a certain day, and she keeps to it now though it's seven years ago."

"And the time is almost up, I think?"

"Yes, sir," and with a sad smile at his wife's fancy, the old farmer went away.

But nothing had been settled about Tom, and Mr. Warne thought the matter over with a heavy heart. If it would have done him any good to shut him into the study and thrash him soundly, Mr. Warne would have set himself to the task without much reluctance, for he thought Tom's back of less importance than that imperishable part of him

that was to be trained in this world for an endless existence in another; but he firmly believed such discipline would be worse than thrown away. So some other course had to be decided on, and it seemed as if the one Farmer Purkiss had suggested would be the wisest in the end. If the question had turned on expelling Reuben Sykes from the school, Mr. Warne would have hesitated much longer, for there were no favourable influences at work at home for Reuben's benefit, but with Tom, it was only the loss of one privilege among many.

But the expelling of a scholar from the Cumberstone school had always been accompanied by a degree of publicity that constituted, perhaps, in the eyes of the offender, its chief punishment. There were terrible recollections in the village of stern denunciations from the master's desk in the time of the former vicar, but Mr. Warne's ministry had been of a milder character, and he had never seen cause, so far, to put the rule in practice. Now, therefore, in Tom's case, he might easily have avoided it, and told him quietly at home that his attendance at the school would be dispensed with for the future; but an intimation to that effect, unless he happened to be meditating some fresh outrage on his teacher, would no doubt have been received with unqualified satisfaction. But Mr. Warne did not wish to spare him any of the shame his evil conduct ought to bring on him, and having once determined on expelling Tom from the school, he prepared himself to go through with the ceremony

in the time-honoured fashion peculiar to Cumberstone. However, he kept his intentions to himself, and Tom went about his work and other more questionable employments during the rest of the week in great exultation of mind, flattering himself that his papa had forgotten all about old Purkiss, or thought the joke that had been played on him too amusing to bring down punishment on the heads of its perpetrators.

But on the following Sunday, after the early family prayer was over, Mr. Warne detained Tom for a few minutes by his side in the study.

"Tom," he said, gravely, "you have a piece of ground of your own in the garden, have you not?"

"Oh yes, papa; the strip along the churchyard hedge."

"And this spring, if all goes well, you will be cultivating it again, I dare say."

Yes, Tom supposed he should; but as the labour involved, in his estimation, more trouble than profit, he did not feel very sure about it.

"And if you should find just as the flowers are beginning to bud, that some noxious weed has crept in hindering their growth, and threatening to cause a great deal of damage, what would you do?"

"Oh pull it out," replied Tom.

"Yes, I don't see how you could avoid it; and if I do the same in my garden you must not think it a needlessly harsh measure."

"Oh no, papa," replied Tom, feeling rather

mystified. "But I didn't know you had a garden—at least not a bit of your own."

"Yes I have, Tom, one that I have spent a great deal of trouble on; but in a certain part of it, where my little plants grow, things have not been going on so well lately, and I am afraid that I shall have to resort to severer means than I like in order to improve them."

"Oh, never mind that, papa," said Tom, beginning to perceive that Mr. Warne was referring to some part of the parish, but not seeing in the least how it could concern him.

"But I do mind, Tom; and presently you will find out why. My little plants are the boys and girls in my school, and if I find they are receiving injury from the bad example of one amongst them, I must remove him, as you would the noxious weed in your garden, and keep him where he can do less harm—at least to others."

"Yes, papa," replied Tom with great readiness; and he went in to breakfast in the firm belief that Reuben Sykes would have his dismissal from the school that day, and that it would be rather good fun to see him march out, and hear what all the folks would say about it.

But entertainment of quite a different kind was before Tom, though it was not so dreadful as it might have been. At the last moment Mr. Warne's heart failed him. He could not bring himself to denounce Tom from the desk, but went round instead, as soon as the opening hymn and prayer

were over, to Farmer Purkiss's class, and told the boys he was very sorry to hear they had given their teacher so much trouble lately.

"Yes, sir," said the farmer; "it isn't the trouble I mind, but there's two among 'em as won't learn themselves, nor let the others."

All eyes were turned towards Reuben and Tom, who were sitting together; and Mr. Warne put his hand gravely on Reuben's shoulder.

"Perhaps I should only be doing my duty by the rest," he said, "if I were to tell you never to come here any more, for you know a bad boy is the enemy of others as well as himself. But I am unwilling to shut you out altogether from a privilege that I hope you will yet learn to value. And so if you will ask your teacher's pardon for your bad conduct, perhaps he will kindly look over it, and give you a fresh trial."

"Thank you, sir," sobbed Reuben, "I'm very sorry I'm sure, and will never do it any more. But it wasn't only me."

"I know that," replied Mr. Warne. "Tom, what have you to say?"

"I, papa!" exclaimed Tom, in the greatest possible amazement. "Nothing! If Master Purkiss tells tales of me, I can't help it."

"But you can help giving him cause; and I hope you mean to say you are sorry, as Reuben has."

But Tom had no idea of humbling himself so far. It was all very well for Reuben, he thought, but he was much too important a personage, and so he held

his ground very manfully, as he fancied, in spite of all the eyes that were fixed upon him.

"Then there is only one thing to do, Tom," said Mr. Warne, "to take your way quietly out, and leave your place for some one who will make a better use of it."

And so Tom went, marching out with his head very erect, and Charlotte, seeing him pass, wondered what was the matter, and did not know exactly afterwards how she got on with her teaching.

And of course the rest of the day was very dismal, at least so far as Charlotte was concerned.

"Do you know what was the matter with Tom, aunt?" she asked of Miss Warne, as the two were leaving school. "I am afraid he has been naughty."

"Not to-day that I know of, Charlotte. But he has been behaving badly in the school for some time back, and your papa has thought it best at last to dismiss him from it."

"Oh how dreadful!" said Charlotte. "I am afraid he will never get over it."

"Oh yes he will, dear," replied Miss Warne, sadly; "all I fear is his not caring for it at all."

But Charlotte thought that if she were in Tom's place she should never dare to hold up her head in Cumberstone again; and by the time she reached the church such a fit of sobbing came on, that Miss Warne told her with a kind kiss that she had better go straight to their pew, and stay quietly there during the service.

"But there is the music, aunt," said Charlotte.

"Never mind, leave that to me;" and the Cumberstone congregation was very much surprised that day to see Miss Warne's stiff figure in Charlotte's place at the harmonium.

And Charlotte, still sobbing, took refuge in a corner of the vicarage pew where Frank and Willy were already seated.

"Isn't Tom coming?" asked Charlotte in a whisper.

"I don't know," replied Willy. "I wouldn't if I were he."

"Then you would be very wrong," said Frank. "I hope he will come."

Then they were very silent as the first notes of a beautiful anthem sounded through the church. Frank got up to see who the player was, and Charlotte hushed her sobs to listen. Such music had never been heard in Cumberstone before; and the children in the vicarage pew, who had no great idea of their Aunt Janet's powers, found out there was something, at all events, that she could do extremely well.

But still Tom did not come. He was taking his revenge for having been sent out of school by staying away from church; and the rest of the service, notwithstanding the pleasant music, was very dreary to Charlotte. At the close of it Mr. Warne overtook them in the church porch.

"Haven't you seen anything of Tom?" he asked.

"No, papa," replied Charlotte; "we had not time to go in after we left the school."

"And you have been crying," said Mr. Warne, as he looked at Charlotte's red eyes; "I hope you do not think I have been very hard on Tom."

"Oh no, papa; you are never hard on any of us."

"I do not wish to be indeed, Charlotte. But I would rather Tom suffered for his faults now than years hence when they will have grown more difficult to cure."

But they were all very anxious about Tom, naughty as he had been, and quite ready to comfort him, supposing he had taken the morning's disgrace to heart. But it is to be feared he had not. Keziah had seen nothing of him, she said, and as Frank had noticed that Reuben Sykes was absent from his usual place in church too, it was conjectured that the two boys had gone off somewhere together. And just as they were sitting down to dinner Tom came in with a red face and very muddy boots.

"How is it you were not at church, Tom?" asked Mr. Warne.

"I did not know I was wanted, papa," returned Tom saucily.

"I think that is a mistake, Tom. You know that when the bells sound out it is an invitation to every one in the village, good and bad together. And how have you spent your morning?"

"Taking a walk, papa."

"During church time on the Sabbath! Did you think about that, Tom? You may fancy you were

a very clever lad, but I am afraid you have been a very sinful one."

However, Tom would only see things as he pleased, and was evidently very well satisfied with his morning's performance. The sad disgrace of being turned out of school, which Charlotte had fancied he would never get over, did not seem to have troubled him at all, and he ate his dinner with great relish, while Charlotte could scarcely swallow a morsel, and Mr. Warne looked pale and grave.

"And now, Tom," said Mr. Warne, as soon as dinner was over, "you will copy out the fourth commandment for me while we are at the school, and start for church directly the bells begin."

"Yes, papa."

And then the others went to their work at the school, Charlotte still very red eyed, and wondering sadly what was to become of Tom, if he did not get any better.

"But I hope he will, dear," said Miss Warne, to whom her fears were confided; "we must all do what we can to help him."

"Yes, aunt. It is a comfort to think he is so young still; Frank was not so good at Tom's age as he is now. But I have not thanked you yet for taking my place at the harmonium. It was so beautiful to listen to your playing, and sometimes almost made me forget my trouble about Tom. I don't know how you have been able to bear my bad music."

"I have not thought it bad, Charlotte, because

it is always correct and simple ; but if you like my playing better, I shall be very pleased to give you lessons."

"Oh, thank you, aunt," replied Charlotte ; and she took gratefully the first gleam of pleasure the day had brought her since Tom marched out of school that morning. And a little later she had another bit of comfort. On entering the church they found Tom was still absent, though the five minute bell was ringing, and Keziah seated in her place.

"Oh, how grieved papa will be," thought Charlotte. But the next moment she saw Frank steal out, and before the bell had stopped, he was back again, bringing Tom with him. "So everything was not so bad as it might have been that day," Charlotte reflected thankfully. "If Tom was naughty they were all going to do what they could to make him better ; and there was always Frank to depend upon to set him a good example."

And in the evening, when all the work of the day was done, and the little party drew round the vicarage fire to rest and talk, Charlotte took heart again.

"What's been the matter with Tom to-day, papa?" asked Hetty, climbing to her favourite place on her papa's knee.

"He has been eating unwholesome fruit, Hetty, like the naughty boys in the 'Pilgrim's Progress,' and it has not agreed with him."

"Oh dear, I am very sorry," said Hetty. "And

what will you do with him, papa ; give him some medicine ?”

“ I don’t know, Hetty. He has had one dose to-day, and it does not seem to have done him any good. If he were wise he would take his cure in hand himself, and then he would soon be well.”

“ Oh, I hope he will, papa. But perhaps he does not know what to do.”

“ Oh yes, he does. He knows there is the kind Physician always ready to hear him, and give him exactly what is best for him.”

“ Oh, you mean the Lord, papa,” said Hetty, brightening ; “ I’m glad of that, because it is so pleasant to go to Him.”

“ It is indeed, Hetty. And if Tom does not find it so now, we must all pray that he may very soon.”

CHAPTER XII.

OUTSIDE his own home Tom could of course find plenty of bad companionship, and that long Sunday morning's ramble with Reuben Sykes was followed by a close intimacy between the two boys. Reuben was several years older than Tom, but, as he was slow, and Tom remarkably sharp, the advantage of taking the lead, and getting things his own way, generally fell to Tom. Perhaps it was a little to his credit that he did not choose the worst of the Sykeses. Next to Reuben was Mark, who had the miserable notoriety of being the most vicious boy in Cumberstone, but Tom had no fancy, as yet, for gross sin, and avoided Mark almost as much as Frank did. What Tom liked to do was to show his independence; and to set off for a five miles' course with Reuben along the dirtiest ways, and then shock his aunt by returning home with muddy boots and an unsatisfactory account of himself, he looked upon as a great success.

"It's such fun to see her," he remarked on one occasion to Reuben, "gathering up her skirts in a

fright when she sees me coming. You don't get bothered at home like that."

"No," replied Reuben, "they ain't no ways particular there;" which was perfectly correct, dirt being regarded in the Sykes's cottage as a necessary evil, that it was not worth while to contend against.

"Ah, and then you can do as you please," said Tom. "I say, how would you like people to be always worrying you about your hair and hands, and company manners?"

"I don't know," replied Reuben, who found it difficult to picture a state of things so entirely out of his experience. "Perhaps I shouldn't mind it if I'd once got into the way of it."

But Tom declared that was impossible, and seeing a field at hand where there were admirable facilities for getting bespattered, he led the way into it, and Reuben meekly followed.

Of course Tom's "company manners" did not get greatly improved by the society he had taken to, though in other ways he was not much injured. Of the two, as Tom was the leader, it seemed likely that Reuben would receive the most harm from the partnership; but the Cumberstone people looking on, of course concluded that Master Tom was going fast to the bad now that he had taken up with one of the Sykeses. This was quite true in one way. Tom was going wrong, but then he had been doing so for some time, and Reuben had no hand in it, except to bear him company in a very passive sort

of fashion. And it is more than probable that if Tom had been allowed to keep on unmolested in his own course, Reuben would soon have become too tame a companion for him, and Mark been taken in his stead. But there were too many watching over him at the vicarage for things to arrive at such a sad pitch as that. Mr. Warne had no particular fears as to the harm likely to be communicated to Tom by Reuben, because he knew exactly what sort of boy he was; but the thing that grieved him chiefly in their intimacy was that it had been begun on Tom's side only to brave those at home. And then the question, What was to be done with him? seemed to call for grave consideration. Tom was only ten, rather too young to cast off all authority, and if he would not submit to the gentle rule at home, it was evident that some stricter one elsewhere must be substituted. But nothing was said about that for the present to Tom. Mr. Warne never threw out threats. It was his way in any difficulty to consider what had best be done, and having once made up his mind, to carry it out quietly and firmly. So Tom still took his walks with Reuben, under the impression that he was getting on famously, and had silenced his persecutors, old Purkiss included, for good.

"It's only to hold out, you know," he remarked to Reuben, "and then you're sure to win."

"Oh, are you?" returned Reuben; "I haven't found it so with father."

"Because you haven't held out long enough. That's the thing, you know."

"Yes, perhaps it is, if you can do it. But then father always settles things at once with his stick."

That was an argument Tom had never had to contend with, but he remarked that if anybody were to try it with him he should follow Joe Purkiss's plan.

"And what's that?" asked Reuben.

"Why, be off. How would you like to go?"

"What, run away? Oh, I don't know; I should like to finish my rabbit hutch first;" and altogether Reuben seemed to think home preferable to the uncertain accommodation to be met with in independent travelling.

"Well, I could go alone," said Tom; "and then you could send me a letter to say how they were taking it at home."

But there were two drawbacks to that arrangement, first that Reuben could not write, and secondly that he would not be very clear as to Tom's whereabouts.

"Oh well, I shouldn't care about letters," said Tom. "I don't suppose Joe Purkiss has ever had any. And besides, when I've got to be captain or something I can come back."

"But perhaps you wouldn't," returned Reuben. "Father says boys that run away never get on, and Joe Purkiss hasn't, as we know off."

"No, because he hasn't thought it worth his

able to come back and tell us ; but perhaps he may some day."

And then Tom told his friend of Mrs. Purkiss's fixed idea that her son would be back on the 10th of October—a day very near at hand ; but Reuben not being of an imaginative turn of mind, did not place much reliance on that supposition.

However, the two boys' conversations were not always of such a pacific character. The doings of the Sunday school, as Tom was not there to see what went on, were often discussed, and Farmer Purkiss's part in them came in for the largest share of attention.

"He's worse since you left," was always Reuben's report. "You see there's only such as me in the class now, so he thinks it don't matter."

"But I'd show him it did," was Tom's advice—bad of course, as usual. "I wouldn't take it."

What there was to take except an occasional lecture, or a returned lesson, never transpired ; but of course it was a fine thing to fancy that poor white-haired Farmer Purkiss was a terrible tyrant, who deserved putting down at any price. And then it became a pleasant recreation to discuss what was to be done to him, and Tom suggested various tricks, but Reuben, without the countenance of Tom's presence, refused to carry them out.

"He had had enough of the last one," he said, "and did not want Mr. Warne to come round to the class again, making him beg the farmer's pardon, which he should be sure to do at once if he were told,

as no one in the place could go against anything that Mr. Warne said, if they tried."

Tom gave a prolonged "Oh!" at that, but the discussion proceeded no further at the time, for, school seeming to be the only place in which to molest a teacher satisfactorily, Reuben's disinclination to perform the business by himself was a sad hindrance.

But, unfortunately, it was not long before the farmer himself suggested the plan of operations. Overtaking the two boys one day in Spring Lane, which, being particularly muddy, was a favourite resort of Tom's, he told them, with a threatening shake of the stick, that he supposed they were about the worst pair in Cumberstone.

"Why, what have we done, Mr. Purkiss?" said Reuben, whose tongue was far more civil than Tom's.

"Oh, plenty of mischief, no doubt. I expect that's what you're always plotting."

"Oh no, it isn't," said Tom; "because we don't often get the chance."

"Ah, that's a pity! but it will come if you look out for it. And something else will come too that you mayn't be looking out for."

"What's that?" asked Tom.

"Why, a time when you'll have to pay for it. That always follows, you know, whether you like it or no."

But Tom was not going to be frightened by what he considered such a very vague prospect as that,

and he stood grinning while the farmer's stick was again shaken at him, but of course, as he did not fail to observe, at a perfectly safe distance.

"If I were to lay this about your shoulders," said Master Purkiss, "it's my belief that it would do you a deal of good."

"You'd better try it!" said Tom, having previously made the reflection that his legs were far more nimble than the farmer's. But Master Purkiss did not, from the same consideration, perhaps, that Tom pressed it; and as he passed on his way with the formidable weapon still upraised, Tom remarked that it would be fine fun to waylay him some dark evening, and get it out of his hand.

"Mayhap it would," said Reuben, "but I shouldn't like to try it."

"And I should," said Tom; and as they happened to meet Mark Sykes before their ramble had come to an end, Tom's scheme was in a fair way of being carried out.

And so it was a few evenings after, but did not succeed, very much to the surprise of the plotters. Farmer Purkiss proved stronger than they had expected, and not only kept firm hold of his stick, but laid it about him to such good purpose that Tom for one went home with a scar on his forehead, which the obstinate tuft above could not be got to hide. He had gone out ostensibly to accompany Frank to his evening class at the school, but had slipped away as soon as the lessons began, hoping to get back unseen before they were over, which was a

feat he had already accomplished several times; however, the ugly scar in his forehead stood out as an undeniable evidence that he had not been spending his time very peaceably that evening, and so he waited at the school door till Frank came out, and then telling him his head ached, which was probably correct, marched straight off to bed as soon as the vicarage was reached.

So nothing was known of the respectable feat in which Tom had been engaged till the next morning, when the scar in his forehead, looking uglier than it had the night before, even Hetty was frightened, and Tom, seeing there was no help for it, was obliged to own how he had come by it.

But his audience, not consisting this time of Mark and Reuben Sykes, the admission was listened to with shame and sorrow. Frank declared, with a heightened colour, that Tom was getting a disgrace to them all, and even Willy, who had enjoyed taking sides with him to a certain point in his downward progress, looked appalled. Mr. Warne ordered Tom at once into the study, turned the key on him, and directly after breakfast was over, went down to Farmer Purkiss to express his sorrow for what had passed. Tom was, as Frank had said, getting a disgrace to them all; but what troubled Mr. Warne far more was that the boy seemed in danger of going to ruin himself; and the question that had been troubling him for some time past received a decided answer that day. Tom must go to school, and Mr. Warne wrote at once to an old friend some

miles off to ask if he could receive him. Tom of course never dreamed of his papa taking such an unheard-of step as this. He had been lectured and punished till he was quite used to both processes; but it did not occur to him that having reached that point some different plan would be tried with him. He was only just "holding out" as he had once explained to Reuben, and of course success and freedom to pursue his own way must follow. It was very ridiculous of Charlotte to cry, and Frank to look so indignant, but if they chose to conduct themselves in that fashion he could not help it. There were the two Sykeses outside to think him a very fine fellow, and plenty of fun in store for all three; but in the midst of these pleasant reflections came the unexpected intelligence that he was to go to school.

"What, on Sunday, papa?" asked Tom, who thought he was going to be given back into Farmer Purkiss's charge.

"No, on the following Monday. You are going to my old friend Dr. Vane, of Cray's Hill, and I will take you myself."

"What, all alone, papa? Isn't Frank or Willy to go too?"

"No, I have no reason for sending them away from home."

Tom stared, but Mr. Warne seemed to have nothing further to say. He had reasoned with Tom till the effort was worse than useless, and now he was to be sent elsewhere to be taught by

strangers. He had never perhaps been so much surprised in his life. School had not once entered into his liveliest imaginings of the indignities that might be inflicted on him; but the day of tender measures was evidently past, and Tom had to sit down and make up his mind to the prospect before him as well as he could.

Of course poor Charlotte cried more than ever. The preparations for Tom's going, in which she had to assist, were distressing to contemplate. Tom had been her pupil—a naughty one certainly, who had never brought his instructress much else than vexation, and yet a very dear one, whom she still hoped to see almost as good as Frank some day. So during that dismal week she often kept herself and Tom awake at night, thinking that the quiet and darkness would make her earnest pleadings with him to be good more effective. But sometimes Tom answered her in such a naughty style that she was quite glad Hetty was asleep and could not hear him; and sometimes he pretended to be fast off too, and after she had given him up would tell her that when there was a dull preacher at work it was best to follow old Giles's example, and go to sleep.

"Oh, but he would be glad to keep awake if he could, Tom," said Charlotte; and then she often lay thinking how strange it was that she and old Giles, who were not very wise, would do anything to learn and grow better, while Tom, who was so sharp, did not care about it at all. But whatever her thoughts

were they always ended that week in her crying herself to sleep. Then in the day she found it a great comfort to go to her Aunt Janet, who was always very kind, Charlotte had discovered, if anybody was in trouble, and the two tried to talk hopefully of Tom as they sat over their work. Sometimes Frank joined them, and read aloud, an unusual attention on his part, but everybody was so pleasant and thoughtful that week Charlotte noticed, everybody but Tom, who still seemed to regard them all as his particular enemies.

"It is so strange, papa," Charlotte remarked to Mr. Warne, "that Tom cannot see how much we all love him."

"I don't know that it is," he replied, sadly; "some of us go on all through life steeling our hearts to deeper love than we can offer Tom. But his is naturally a very combative nature, and until he has found the right thing to fight with he will fight with the wrong."

"But he has always had you to teach him, papa."

"Yes, but not with much result, as you see. I hope Dr. Vane will be more successful."

"And if he isn't, papa, what shall we do?"

"Trust Tom still, as I have always done, Charlotte, to the care of the one wise and patient Teacher."

"Yes, papa," and Charlotte tried to look beyond Dr. Vane, and take comfort.

But the point at which her distress reached its climax was, when a box was dragged into her room

to be filled with all the garments that she and Miss Warne had been making and mending together—a large deal box, the very article Tom had such a special objection to, and firmly intended never to possess. But there it was, and at the sight of it Charlotte could have sat down and cried in hopeless misery, if it had not been for the thought of all the work that had yet to be finished and stowed away in it. She was sadly afraid that Tom would break down too when he saw that unpleasant receptacle ; but greatly to her surprise, he seemed to regard it in the light of a joke, and find considerable amusement in it.

“Oh dear,” he said with a grin, “that’s for me, I suppose. I hope it’s big enough !”

“Yes, but it’s all the better for that, Tom ; we shall not find too much room when we begin to pack. Is there anything you want me to put away in it for you ?”

“Oh, no, thank you. I can take care of my things myself.”

“But they had better go in here, Tom. There will be nothing else to put them in.”

“Oh, won’t there ! Well, we shall see ; I don’t like boxes, you know.”

“No, but people can’t travel without them, Tom.”

“Oh, can’t they ! Well, never mind, you can pack that one just as you like ; only don’t put in it anything I’m likely to want.”

This was a most extraordinary direction to give,

but Tom had been so inexplicable altogether, that Charlotte only regarded it as part of all the perversity that had gone before, and went on quietly with her work.

So the box was packed at last, and on the Saturday morning it was corded up in preparation for the Monday morning's journey. Tom had then but one clear day to remain at home, and Charlotte hoped that he would make a good use of it.

"You won't lose one of the services to-day, Tom, will you?" she said.

"Oh, I don't know," returned Tom, "that will depend——"

"Depend on what, Tom? Oh, do try to think, and be good. Recollect, it's your last Sunday at home, and that you won't have papa to preach to you again till you come back."

"No, but then, I expect there'll be somebody else."

"Somebody else! Oh, Tom, but that will not be papa." And Charlotte thought so sadly all the way to the school of Tom's want of feeling that she was scarcely fit to teach that day, or indeed to do anything else.

And so Miss Warne again came to her aid, and as her beautiful opening anthem filled the little church with its sweet melody, Charlotte hoped that Tom would be moved by that, even if he did not care for his papa's preaching. However, he was still fighting his battle with great perseverance, and

did not feel in the mood to be touched by what he would have called a stupid old tune.

But what must have been worse to bear, supposing that Tom really did possess some little spark of feeling, was the kindness he received from everybody that day. He had been very naughty—setting loving control at defiance; but now he was going away, and they wished him to retain a pleasant memory of his home to sweeten any little hardships he might have to bear elsewhere, and make the thought of coming back always welcome to him.

“Recollect,” said Mr. Warne to Tom, before they parted for the night, “that I am not sending you away in anger, but because I think that stricter discipline is necessary for you than you can have here.”

“Yes, papa.”

“And I hope it will bring you to your senses, and make you value your home ties, and the gentle rule that has been exercised there to keep you right.”

“Yes, papa,” returned Tom again; and as it was evident that he meant to agree with everything and care for nothing, he was allowed to go quietly to his room, without any more being said to him.

And an hour later Charlotte followed him, opening the door noiselessly, as usual, so as not to disturb the sleepers within, but a sudden gust of wind blew out her candle as she advanced into the room, and some piteous sobs from Hetty announced

that all further caution, so far as she was concerned, was unnecessary.

"What is the matter, Hetty?" asked Charlotte, "some one has left the window open."

"Yes, it's Tom, and I can't wake him."

Not to be able to wake Tom seemed something extraordinary; and as Charlotte went round to Hetty's side, she was seized, she did not know exactly why, with a sudden fear that something dreadful had happened.

"Tom, Tom!" she gasped, "where are you?"

But there was no answer. The room was dark, and no sound was to be heard in it but the cold wind blowing through it, and the fitful splashing of the rain.

"Why doesn't he speak?" asked Hetty, clinging in affright to Charlotte. "Is he dead? Has any one killed him?"

"Oh no, Hetty; perhaps he is asleep. Will you lie down for a minute again while I get a light?"

But Hetty shrank from being left alone any longer in the mysterious darkness, and so Charlotte caught her up in her arms, and ran back to the dining-room, where Mr. Warne and his sister were preparing to separate for the night.

"Oh, papa," she said, "there's something the matter; I can't find Tom."

"Not find him!" he repeated; and with his light in his hand he hurried upstairs. But it was blown out before he reached the landing; and fol-

lowed closely by Charlotte, he groped his way into the dark room, and shut down the window.

"Oh, papa," said Charlotte, "I am so afraid he is gone!"

"Gone where?" asked Mr. Warne.

"Oh, I don't know, papa—ran away, as Joe Purkiss did."

"But has he ever threatened to do such a thing?"

"No, I think not," Charlotte answered, without, however, feeling quite sure on the point; "but he often used to talk about it."

Then a gleam of light shone up the stairs, and Miss Warne came in, bringing her candle, with which a hasty inspection of the room was made. But Tom was nowhere to be found, and the only trace discoverable of him was a queerly-folded missive directed to Charlotte.

"I'm not going to school," it ran, "nor to take the box, which you may break to papa as well as you can. It has only hurried it, you know, as I always meant to go, and this seems as good a time as any. I don't know how jo Purkis did it, but I've got Hetty's skipping-rope and something else, and expect to be able to manidge. Don't let anybody come after me, because it wouldn't be any use, and you're sure to see me back some birthday. Give my love to Reuben and old Mat. And I think that's all.—Your affectionate brother, TOM WARNE.

"Don't forget to go round to-morrow to see if he has come home."

"If who has come home?" asked Miss Warne, who was greatly bewildered, or she would not have specially noticed that part of the letter.

"Joe Purkiss; it is the 10th, aunt—the day his mother expects him back. Oh dear, what shall we do!"

"Go downstairs, and make yourselves comfortable while I look after Tom," returned Mr. Warne. "He cannot have got far."

And the next minute the Vicar went off through the chill October rain, and the rest—including Frank and Willy, who had just emerged from their room, and heard what had occurred—went back to the dining-room. Everything looked very dismal there, the fire and lamp being out; but Keziah came in and lit both, as it seemed likely that the household watch would be a prolonged one that night. Then Frank put on his great-coat, thinking he might as well join in the search for Tom as sit by the fire, and said he should look in at the Turners', on his way, to see if Ben or Ned would go with him.

"And between them all," said Willy, as he shut the door on Frank, "they're sure to catch him."

But Miss Warne and Charlotte were too much frightened to feel so certain about that; and the little party drew round the fire, and sat listening silently for the sound of coming footsteps in the lane. Then as the clock in the passage dismally struck eleven, Willy was persuaded to go to bed, and Charlotte carried Hetty back to her room, intending

to return and keep Miss Warne company as soon as the child was asleep. But the sight of Tom's empty bed put the little thing into such a fright again that Charlotte had to lie down with her to soothe her, and that was scarcely done before the quiet of the room quite overcame Charlotte too in her turn, and she fell fast asleep.

CHAPTER XIII.

A LIGHT shining into her room roused Charlotte two or three hours later, and she started up with a sudden hope that Tom had come home; but it was only Miss Warne, who was wrapping a warm shawl softly round her.

"Oh, thank you, aunt," said Charlotte, "but I did not mean to go to sleep;" and she disengaged herself from Hetty's fat arms, and followed her aunt downstairs.

"Well, dear, your papa has been home, and gone out again," was Miss Warne's news, as they sat down by the parlour fire.

"And they haven't heard anything of Tom?"

"No; the night is so dark, they can scarcely see an inch before them, and so wet, too. It has not ceased raining these last two hours;" and then Miss Warne resumed her occupation of listening again.

Charlotte felt very much ashamed of herself for having gone to sleep, and remarked presently that she did not know how she could have done so when she was so full of trouble about Tom.



"But I am glad you did, dear, because it has helped to shorten the dismal night for you."

And as they were both quiet again, a footstep was heard outside, faint at first, but very heavy as it drew nearer.

"It's not papa or Frank," said Charlotte, as she rose to open the door. But at the same moment a window overhead was thrown up, and Willy was shouting out to know if Tom were found.

"Not as I knows on," was the answer. "That's just what I came to see; but if he ain't, I must go home all one, for I'm dead beat."

"It's Mat Turner," said Miss Warne. "Will you ask him to come in and rest a little?"

Charlotte did so, and with some difficulty persuaded old Mat to accept the invitation.

"I ain't in no sort of trim to be seen," he said, which was perfectly true; for, as Miss Warne did not fail to observe directly he entered the parlour, he did not seem to have a dry thread on him.

"I daresay not, ma'am," replied Mat, sitting down composedly, "but I'm used to that, and don't take no account on it."

"But perhaps it may take some account of you," replied Miss Warne, smiling. "I think the best thing you can do is to go to bed at once, and then take something warm, if you have anybody at home to give it you."

"Yes, there'll be my Nancy waiting up, and perhaps the missis too."

"Then they must put some of that into a tumbler

of hot water for you ;” and Miss Warne consigned a couple of glasses of brandy to a small bottle, telling Mat that she hoped the dose would prevent his taking any harm.

“Oh, there ain’t no fear of that, ma’am, thank you,” replied Mat, disposing of the bottle leisurely in one of his wet pockets ; “and when Master Tom turns up, perhaps you’ll one of you step over and let me know, for I don’t expect I shall settle down comfortable till he does.”

“Yes, Willy or I will run round,” said Charlotte ; “you may depend on that.”

“And the master won’t be down on him too sharp, I hope,” said Mat, in a conciliatory tone, to Miss Warne.

“No, I think I can answer for that, Master Turner. The first thing to be done with him, I suppose, will be to give him something to eat, and put him to bed.”

“Just so, ma’am ; I couldn’t have hit on anything better myself. But to think,” continued Mat, meditatively, “of his leaving his love for me. I can’t get over that !” And still turning the surprising circumstance over in his mind, Master Turner went slowly homewards.

He had not been gone many minutes before Mr. Warne came back, nearly in as bad a plight as Mat had been, and announced that his wanderings were over for some hours at least.

“But still I don’t promise to go to bed,” he said ; “I’ll change my clothes, and then, if you’ll

give me some tea, we will sit awhile longer, just to see what news the boys bring home. Old Turner's principal trust was in them from the first. I met Ned at the end of Spring Lane—just off, as he said, on a fresh start—and he seemed as lively as when we first set out. It's my opinion that the boys have all thoroughly enjoyed themselves, Tom, perhaps, excepted; and he must be pretty tired by this time. Ah, there's the gate!"

And there was the window overhead as well, at the same time, which made the most noise of the two.

"I say, who's that?" shouted Willy.

"Why it's I," was answered in Frank's voice; "is Tom back?"

"No; aren't you coming in?"

There was no answer, and the clang of the gate announced that Frank, like Ned Turner, was off on a "fresh start."

"Dear me," said Miss Warne, as Willy's window was closed again; "the boy calls that going to bed."

"Well, it does not seem much like it," said Mr. Warne, "and if he is so wakeful perhaps he would be better down here. Suppose you run up and tell him so, Charlotte."

Charlotte went, and then Mr. Warne said he should fetch Frank back, for it was no use to attempt anything further till they could see what they were about. Miss Warne brought forward his drenched outer coat, but it had ceased raining by that time,

and the Vicar ran out without it, shouting to Frank to come back. A few streaks of grey were already showing in the east, and Miss Warne and Charlotte, feeling greatly relieved at the sight of them, stood at the open door till Mr. Warne returned, bringing Frank with him. But he came greatly against his will, declaring himself quite able to set off again directly.

"Very well," said Mr. Warne, "only you must have a dry suit and some tea before you go. I dare say Aunt Janet can give you a cup."

Of course Miss Warne could, drying clothes and tea-making having been her chief occupations during the night. But a rest was at hand for them all. Frank had scarcely finished his tea when the gate banged to again, and this time the sound was accompanied by a shout and a prolonged hurrah!

"There he is!" cried Frank and Willy in a breath; and both boys raced off to the door.

And there he was, but in most miserable plight! A hero shorn of all his glory! Getting out of window might be a splendid achievement, but coming back by the door was dismal work, and Tom evidently thought so. By his side, grasping Tom firmly with one hand, and a little wet bundle in the other was Ben Turner.

"You see I've found him," said Ben, gleefully, "but that wasn't the worst. It was getting him back, and that just *was* a job!"

Tom, probably, had not been an easy capture to make, and there was a suspicious blackness about

one of Ben's eyes that suggested the probability of Tom's having made a dash at it in self-defence. But just now, standing at the door in the bleak morning twilight, with his head down, and clothes wet and muddy, he did not look by any means as if he had gone through adventures to be proud of.

"Come in, both of you," said Mr. Warne, kindly; and his sister took her place at the tea or rather breakfast-table, while Charlotte cut a pile of bread and butter, and Willy opened the shutters.

"Now you must drink that," said Mr. Warne, passing a cup of hot tea to Tom.

Tom tried to obey, but the first sip nearly choked him, and he burst out crying.

"May I take him up to bed, papa?" asked Charlotte. "I think he'll be best there."

It did seem as if it would be a charity to hide him somewhere out of everybody's way, and Mr. Warne seeing that, let him go, telling him he would bring him up some tea himself by and by.

As soon as Tom was gone, Ben had to tell his adventures as well as he could between the slices of bread and butter. He had found Tom at Nettlestead, he said, a farm scarcely three miles off, and should have had him back a couple of hours sooner, only he did not like to use force. At the sound of this ugly word, everybody looked at Ben's eye, but said nothing about it, a silence most agreeable to Ben's own feelings, as it was evident that he tried to keep that injured member as much as possible in the shade.

"'Twasn't likely, you see," said Ben, "as he would fancy coming home. I shouldn't myself if I'd gone off like him."

"But how did you catch him?" asked Mr. Warne. "I passed along that road twice myself."

"Well, I wasn't in a hurry, you see," replied Ben, "and when I'd got some way past the farm, I happened to hear a dog bark, and thought I might as well go back and see what it was about. Then it was quiet for a bit, but as I watched, keeping myself well hid, the dog began again, and then I see something stealing along on the other side of the hedge, and sure enough, it was Master Tom."

"And what did he say when you caught him?" asked Willy.

"Well, he didn't say nothing," returned Ben, getting his black eye further into the shade. "Only he didn't like it, that was plain enough, and he wouldn't hear no sort of reason."

"Then why didn't you take him to the farm," asked Frank, "and get some one there to send him home?"

"Oh, they was all abed," said Ben, "and besides, I wanted to get Master Tom back of his own free will, if I could. But the job it was, and the times he went back to his first state of mind about running away, was surprising!"

Mr. Warne would have liked to hear what arguments Ben used on Tom, but he knew that his eloquence was of the rough impromptu kind that would not improve by repetition; and so he let the

wish pass, and helped Ben to more bread and butter. However, his appetite, keen as it was, seemed appeased at last, and the fireside party gradually dispersed—some going to bed just as the rest of the folks in Cumberstone were getting up, and Ben starting homewards with much satisfaction at his night's work, and the handsomest book under his arm that he had ever possessed in his life.

CHAPTER XIV.

CHARLOTTE, Willy, and Hetty, having had the least exertion on the previous night, were allowed to keep up during the morning some semblance of wakeful existence at the vicarage. They had rather a pleasant time of it altogether, being left entirely to their own devices, and having the adventures of the past night to discuss, which they did with much enjoyment, now that Tom was safely stowed away in his bed upstairs. About noon the rest of the household came down, and things went on much as usual. Except, of course, with Tom, who crept round to the fireside, where he sat looking thoroughly miserable. However, no one attempted to molest him. Hetty took her stool to his side, and seeing something was amiss, brought forward "Mother Crabsticks" and other literary stores for his entertainment; but not finding her treasures appreciated, she fell to patting him with her fat hands, and calling him her dear Tom, till the soothing exercise sent them both to sleep.



Early in the afternoon Charlotte superintended the preparation of an unusually nice tea, hoping it would tempt Tom's appetite, which had not been very keen during the day. It was not quite right to pamper him, she was afraid, after he had been so naughty, and given them all so much trouble; but then he looked so wretched that she hoped he was sorry, and longed to comfort him. So she made a pile of hot cakes, with Keziah's help, to which Tom did not show himself altogether indifferent; and directly after tea Mr. Warne told him that if he liked he might go out with him, and pay a visit.

"Thank you, papa," replied Tom, with more briskness than he had shown all day; and in the hazy autumn twilight they set out together. Tom was very glad to find that their way did not lie through the village, as he was rather afraid of being pointed at as an unsuccessful runaway, and especially dreaded meeting Ben Turner, about the state of whose visage he had some unpleasant misgivings. But nothing was seen of him, or any one else, likely to disturb Tom's peace of mind, and in due time they quitted the decent highway to turn into the mire of Spring Lane. It was hard work to get on there, after the heavy rain of the preceding night, and Tom wondered greatly why his papa had chosen that way, as the lane, among its other disadvantages, had not even the recommendation of being a short cut. But midway down, when the old farmhouse was reached,

Tom stood still and stared in utter bewilderment.

"What's the matter, Tom?" asked Mr. Warne.

"Why, there's a light there, papa!"

"There" could only apply to the single window visible from the lane, the high prison-like aperture out of which Joe Purkiss had made his memorable descent.

"Yes, it was lit yesterday for the first time, I believe, for seven years."

"Then he's come home?" gasped Tom.

"Yes; and I am going to take you to see him."

But Tom was in no hurry to move. He had looked up at that window so many years in its blank darkness that now to see the light shining there, and realize what it meant, was, for the time, satisfaction enough. So he stood and wondered how Joe had come back, whether he had crept in at the long-closed window on the dark early morning of his birthday, lit the light himself, and then been found in quiet possession there some time after, or whether he had been brought home in disgrace, as had been his own lot the night before, till Mr. Warne's voice calling to him from the gate to come in, cut short Tom's speculations.

They found the kitchen quite deserted, and the half-knitted stocking, which Tom had generally seen before in Mrs. Purkiss's lap, lying in the window-sill, with one needle drawn out, as if it had been thrown down there in haste, and no one

had found leisure since to take it up and set it right.

"I think we may go to him at once," said Mr. Warne, "as he expects us."

Tom would have liked to pause again at the foot of the stairs—those stairs that he had often longed to mount; and to be obliged to follow his papa up them now in a matter-of-fact way, was getting over the day's wonders a great deal too fast. On reaching the first landing Tom found there was another flight to climb, a steep dark one, leading probably only to that distant chamber of Joe's; and when it was at last reached, Tom was glad to take refuge in a shadowy corner, where he could look on and think it all over without being hurried.

He had expected to find Joe Purkiss a lad something like Ben Turner, and that he would be seated at the table, telling his adventures, with his mother, perhaps, holding his hand, and crying over him. But the room presented no such pretty picture. Joe was lying in bed, and looked so old in Tom's eyes, that at first he thought it was a mistake, and that his father must have got there instead. But then old Joe was stout and ruddy, and this one so gaunt and haggard that Tom felt glad he had not met him when he was out on his own travels the night before. By the fire, which was blazing high up the chimney, and looked the only cheerful thing in the room, was Mrs. Purkiss, warming something in a saucepan.

"Ah, so you've come to see my lamb," she said, as she turned round and saw Mr. Warne.

"Yes," he answered, sitting down at the bedside; but as Tom looked at Joe, he could not help thinking that he was far more like a hungry wolf than a lamb.

"I'll just give him this," said Mrs. Purkiss, referring to the contents of her saucepan, "and then he'll be ready."

The warm mixture was administered, and the next minute Joe turned his hungry eyes on Mr. Warne.

"I be ready now, sir," he said.

If the doctor had been seated in Mr. Warne's place, Tom would have felt afraid that Joe was about to undergo some terrible operation—the loss of a leg, perhaps—to cure him of all future tendency to run away; but as it was, the ceremony that followed was quite peaceful. Mr. Warne drew out his small pocket Bible, and read slowly the parable of the Good Shepherd.

"Ah, that's it, sir," said Mrs. Purkiss, who was seated on the other side of the bed. "He's brought my lamb home at last, I knew He would."

Joe stared at Mr. Warne till the wild gleam in his eyes softened a little. Perhaps he was looking back at the dreary chain of circumstances so hard to bear at the time, that had gradually led him home, and wondering whether the Good Shepherd had really had anything to do with the ordering of it.

"Do you think it is so, sir?" he asked.

"If I know," replied Mr. Warne, "that I cannot injure one of the sparrows on my way home without my Father in heaven seeing it, I am sure He does not interest Himself less in your affairs and mine, Joe. And the Good Shepherd tells us that we are of more value in his sight than many sparrows."

"But when I look back, sir," said Joe, "it seems as if my own wild will had done it all."

"Because you can only see one side of the picture, Joe. But the Good Shepherd can see both, and distinguish his work from yours."

"And He's brought you back, Joe," said Mrs. Purkiss. "I would not be without the certainty of that for all the treasures in the world! He's brought you back that I may have you for a little while before He takes you to his own fold."

Joe tried to answer, but a fit of coughing came on; and when it was over, Mrs. Purkiss took to stirring her little saucepan again, and administered another warm draught that seemed to do the poor wanderer good. Then, as he turned his head towards Mr. Warne, he spied out Tom, for the first time, crouched down in his corner.

"Is that the little boy that ran away last night?" he asked.

"Yes," replied Mr. Warne. "Come here, Tom, and shake hands with Joe."

Tom obeyed with more trepidation than he had ever felt before in his life. But then Joe Purkiss had been his hero as long as he could remember, and to follow his adventures in imagination had kept him awake on many a stormy night; and though it was rather disappointing to find him lying so helpless in bed, still it was Joe Purkiss for all that, and therefore to shake hands with him was the greatest honour to which Tom could aspire.

"You fancied it was a fine thing to run away, I dare say," said Joe.

"Yes," replied Tom, proudly, thinking he had found a sympathetic spirit at last.

"And yet it don't seem like it, if you think of it," said Joe, meditatively. "We don't admire a soldier who runs away from his post, nor a sailor who deserts his ship, do we?"

"No," replied Tom, reluctantly, for he did not know what that admission might lead to.

"And I can't see that a boy who won't bear his home troubles, and runs away from them, is any more of a hero. But shall I tell you what I *do* think he is?"

"Yes," murmured Tom, though he was beginning to see that of the two he would much rather Joe let it alone.

"Well, I think he's a coward," said Joe, emphatically. "And seven years ago when I made my way out of that window because I couldn't bear my father's hard words and heavy stick, I was a



coward; and you see what my cowardice has brought me to!"

Tom did very plainly, for Joe's excitement made his gauntness and haggardness more apparent than it was before; and he was greatly relieved when his papa came between them with soothing words, and he was able to shrink back unmolested to his corner again.

But it was no longer to him a post of delightful observation. The halo had gone from his hero, and even the room, and mysterious window that he had watched so long, had grown suddenly common-place. But the disenchantment was not pleasant, and Tom, for the time, felt none the better for it, nor for any of the other vexations that had come upon him. He did not offer to shake hands with Joe Purkiss again on leaving, and was glad that nobody reminded him of the omission. He would rather go home, he decided, and think it all over, and get used, if possible, to this new state of things before seeing him again.

So in perfect silence Tom tramped back through Spring Lane, at Mr. Warne's side. He felt thoroughly wretched, and it was a relief to him that nothing was said of what had passed at the farm. But at the vicarage gate he was obliged to pause and answer a question.

"Tom, what do you think of running away now?"

"I don't know, papa," replied Tom, bursting

into tears ; "it seems very bad, and so does everything else."

The answer was not very satisfactory on the whole, but Mr. Warne let it pass without comment ; and Tom, not caring to say another word to any one that night, crept away to the quiet and darkness of his own room.

CHAPTER XV.

BUT no pleasant slumbers visited Tom that night. The gaunt figure of Joe Purkiss seemed to haunt him, and he was a cold uncomfortable phantom, that made him shiver in his bed, and curl down closer under the clothes. Still he bore this unpleasant companionship quite manfully till Charlotte had betaken herself to her bed, and was just sinking peacefully to sleep, when Tom made a sudden wrench at her counterpane, and informed her in a hoarse whisper that he was afraid something was the matter.

“Oh dear, I hope not, Tom; what is it?”

“I don’t know,” replied Tom, “but I feel as if Joe Purkiss had got hold of me.”

Charlotte could not quite make out what sort of a sensation that was, but she slipped out of bed, and relit her candle. Then she saw that Tom was sitting up in bed, looking very white and wild, and shaking as if he had just had some terrific fright.

“He said I was a coward,” remarked Tom, as he wiped his face with his trembling hands, “and I

suppose I am. But, oh dear, it's dreadful! I'd rather be anything else."

"I expect you're not well," said Charlotte. "Shall I call Aunt Janet?"

"No," replied Tom, "I don't want her!" However, he took to shaking again the next minute in such an alarming fashion, that Charlotte, without waiting for permission, ran off in search of Miss Warne. She found her still up, fortunately, and ready, as usual, to give her quiet help, but by the time they got back to Tom the shaking fit had given way to an obstinate one, and he was hidden away under the bed-clothes, declaring that there was nothing the matter with him.

"But I think there is," said Miss Warne, and, without consulting Tom's pleasure in the matter, she put the clothes gently back and pillowed his head on her arm. Of course he made some resistance, but being taken at a disadvantage, he had to yield and lie as quiet as his very tiresome symptoms would let him.

"And now," said Miss Warne, passing her keys over to Charlotte, "you must put on your warm cloak and bring up some wine."

"But I don't want any," gasped Tom.

"Yes you do, Tom. You are going to take it and be a good boy."

At any other time Tom would have resented the last proposition highly, but with his head nestling in the folds of Miss Warne's soft silk, it did not seem so easy to quarrel with her. And besides,

there was something strangely soothing in the touch of her hand, and kind tones of her voice ; and so when the wine appeared Tom sipped it quite amicably, and seemed comforted.

"There, now you are better," said Miss Warne, to which Tom faintly assented, but it was evident that there was still something very uncomfortable the matter with him.

"I think he must have had a bad dream," said Charlotte, who remembered Hetty having waked up once or twice in a fright, though not such a terrible one as Tom's had been.

Miss Warne did not give any opinion in the matter, but she kept her place at Tom's side, and told Charlotte she had better go back to bed.

"But you don't think he'll have it again, aunt, do you?"

"I hope not, dear ; but I will just wait here till he is asleep. I can shade my light so as not to disturb you."

And so, in a pleasant twilight, Charlotte dozed off some little time after, and did not know till the day dawned that Tom had had what he called another clutch of Joe Purkiss, and that Miss Warne had been sitting with him through the night.

Of course the rest of the household were greatly surprised to hear what had been going on while they were asleep, and they stole in one by one to have a look at Tom as they went down to breakfast. But he was still in a surly mood, and refused to answer inquiries civilly. It was only Joe Purkiss

who had been having a few clutches at him, was all he could be got to say; and when his papa sat down beside him, and asked what he meant by that, Tom showed no disposition to explain. But Miss Warne was at hand to answer for him; and Tom heard, greatly to his surprise, that he was not only confidently expected to be quite well shortly, but a good boy at the same time.

"I hope he will," said Mr. Warne, gravely.

And after he was gone, and Miss Warne had kissed him tenderly, Tom hid his face under the bed-clothes, to have a good cry—an unusual demonstration of sensibility on his part, which he attributed, perhaps correctly, to the weakening effect of the clutches that he had been subjected to during the night.

But though Miss Warne had spoken so hopefully of soon seeing him well again, Tom noticed that preparations were made in the room during the day, as if to meet a serious illness. There was no doctor called in, certainly, which was the only circumstance Tom could take comfort from; but, so far as things could look alarming without that grave personage, they certainly did, and Tom wondered greatly what was coming. "Only a little attack of ague," they told him, which was scarcely to be wondered at after his long ramble, three nights back, in the pouring rain; but what that had to do with his queer feeling of Joe Purkiss having clutched him with his cold hands, till the bed seemed shaking under him, Tom could not see.

And superintending all the arrangements was

Miss Warne, who had Charlotte and Hetty removed to her own room, and installed herself with Tom.

"And you won't mind it, dear, will you?" said Charlotte, who was afraid that Tom would not prove a very tractable patient.

"No, I suppose it will be no use. People are always bothered when they get ill."

But so far as the bother of Miss Warne's presence was concerned, Tom soon grew to like it. She had a quiet way of moving about, notwithstanding the rustling silk, and Joe Purkiss's clutches never seemed so hard and merciless when she was by to minister to him. Things were changed with both of them. Miss Warne had found a work that suited her exactly, because it made her forget her natural shyness, and enabled her to give free vent to the love that was really in her heart for children; and Tom, now that there was no help for it, accepted her affection, and all the self-denying ministrations it prompted, with great condescension.

"You see it isn't being looked after," he remarked to Charlotte, with a view to maintaining his old theory of independence.

"Not in one way, Tom," replied Charlotte.

"Well, that's what I mean. I don't mind being looked after in the right way, you know."

"But perhaps they are both the right way, Tom. I think when papa or Aunt Janet correct our faults, it is just as much out of love as when they try to give us pleasure."

"Oh, I dare say," said Tom; but though his

words were as off-hand as ever, they were not spoken in the usually confident tone. The experience he had been going through lately—his inglorious flight, his interview with Joe Purkiss, and now his weary illness—had not been altogether without effect. Sometimes, as he was lying awake at night with the great black box, that was to have been the companion of his journey to Dr. Vane's, staring him in the face, it did occur to him that he might have made a few blunders, and that life, perhaps, had not been given him for the sole purpose of having his own way. But such thoughts were very slow at taking hold of him, because he fought them off as long as he could. He had owned to his papa, after seeing Joe Purkiss, that everything was very bad, by which he meant the special things in which he had, so far, taken pleasure; but though that conviction had been deepening in him since, he had not gone a step further, and tried to like others that might have brought him more satisfaction. A long pause sometimes occurs between the laying aside of old tastes and ways and the taking up of new ones, and Tom was precisely at that inactive point. He did not want to be off on the ramble with one of the Sykeses, because he was not sure that the expedition would afford him any gratification; but unfortunately he felt the same doubt with respect to his duties. So he moped about during the day, either in the warmth of his own bedroom fire, or in a gleam of sunshine in the garden, and at night conflicts with the paroxysms of his

disease, and his own dismal thoughts. But it was wretched work altogether, and even Tom, much as he liked fighting, gave way at last. He had had many a good cry under his bed-clothes ; but one night he made no attempt to hide his tears, but sobbed them out on Miss Warne's arm, where, as usual, he had been tenderly supported till the shaking fit had passed off.

"That's right, Tom," said Miss Warne, who understood his difficulties ; "it will do you good."

"No, it won't," gasped Tom, with his usual perversity ; "nothing does."

"Because you have not found the right thing yet ; but I believe you will."

"No, I shan't ; I've given it up. But, oh dear, it's dreadful ! Do you think I am going to die ?"

"No, dear ; I hope not."

"Because, if I am, I should like to find the—the right thing first, you know."

"Yes, dear." And Miss Warne's own quiet tears began to flow, and she held Tom tightly in her arms. However, she was not thinking only of him, but of the many confident spirits who had toiled through life without ever having found what Tom called "the right thing" to the last.

"Do you think it's too late ?" asked Tom.

"No, dear, not if you have the mind for it."

"Ah, that's it," returned Tom, "and I haven't, you know."

Miss Warne looked pityingly at him, but did not attempt anything in the way of counsel. Tom was

as well informed, she was perfectly aware, on religious matters as she was, perhaps in one way—the talking part—he could have outshone her. Familiarity with religious truths and no experience of their power had been Tom's great mistake so far; and talking, Miss Warne knew, would only make matters worse. He must learn to appreciate home affection before he could be led to look up in trustfulness to the higher love that alone could satisfy him and keep him right. But that was a slow process. He had wandered so far in wrong ways, that many weary backward steps had to be taken before he would find himself in a right one. It was part of the discipline that he needed, and Miss Warne watched its working hopefully, though it must give him, she knew, a great deal of present suffering.

"I've been a bad boy," Tom proceeded, when he could draw his breath a little easier, "because I liked it best. It *is* pleasantest to be bad, isn't it?"

Miss Warne knew that it was not, and to many children she would have replied by a decided No; but it was no use to deal with Tom in that way, as he always liked to argue a matter out.

"There's a certain kind of pleasantness about it, Tom," she said; "but do you know what it consists in?"

"No," replied Tom, "not exactly."

"In not having had much experience of anything better. I do not suppose that Adam, who had lived in the garden of Eden, and talked with the Lord, found sin so easy and pleasant as we do."

"No, but we haven't got anything of that kind to look back upon."

"But we may look forward to it, which is better ; and the more we do so the less we shall love anything that would be out of place there."

"Oh yes, we should try to be good, I dare say, but that wouldn't make it pleasant."

"Not at first, Tom. If your papa took your friend Reuben Sykes out of his dirt and misery to live with us, he would, no doubt, find cleanliness and order very tiresome, disagreeable things at first, but after a time, as he grew accustomed to them, they might become as necessary to his comfort as they are to mine."

"Then you think being used to things is everything," said Tom.

"I believe it goes a great way with us."

"Then it isn't our fault if we like what we're used to best."

"Perhaps not always ; but the evil lies in wilfully choosing what is wrong, and practising it till we get to love it. Reuben Sykes did not choose his dirt and misery, but you did your naughty ways, Tom ; so that I cannot see that the blame of them attaches to any one but yourself."

"No," replied Tom, who did not mind admitting it as a matter of argument, "perhaps not. But if I don't care about them now, how is it that I don't care about the other things."

"Well, we'll see. But tell me first what you think of my little drawing-room at home?"

"How can I," said Tom, "if I have never seen it?"

"And how can you tell me whether you like the ways of pleasantness, Tom, when you have never tried them?"

"Ah, but I don't feel as if I should," replied Tom.

"Then I would not trouble my head about my feelings at all."

"But if we're good without liking it," said Tom, "it isn't being good at all, is it?"

"Well, that is a difficult question to answer. Perhaps it is not being very good, but still it is a step in the right direction. When I first came here, dear Charlotte was good, as you call it, without liking it, that is, she obeyed me because it was right, not because she loved me, and found it pleasant to do what I told her; but now, you know, we get on quite happily together. And I would advise you to follow the same course with a higher Teacher. Let us see what He says about it Himself, 'Ye are my friends, if ye do whatsoever I command you'; and if the work is not done in a loving spirit at first, Tom, the Lord may still acknowledge it, and teach you gradually to like it for his own sake."

But Miss Warne was not very great at argument, and always avoided it if she could, knowing that it would do Tom no good. He had had a great deal of that kind of exercise with Farmer Purkiss, and been none the better for it. Of course on a sick

bed he was more open to instruction, but the old spirit was still strong within him, and his aunt generally found that the close of an argument left him less impressed than the beginning. Tears always gave place to an eager desire to get the best of Aunt Janet, or lead her into difficulties as he used old Purkiss; and then, if he fancied he had succeeded, there would be no more signs of contrition till another ague fit came on, or, as Tom expressed it, Joe Purkiss was clutching at him again.

But one night it happened that Joe clutched so hard that Tom was quite unable to get up the next day, and with his strength went, as is the case with such heroes as Tom, his confidence too. He was in no mood for argument, but wanted comfort of some kind, and of course could not find it. Charlotte tried a book, which Tom said only bothered him, and as the rest of the household, Hetty excepted, were too busy to offer their services in the way of entertaining him, Tom had to lie during the greater part of the day with no better companion than his own thoughts. Miss Warne never laid herself out to entertain him, which was one reason, perhaps, of the influence she was getting over him. She was always at hand when he wanted her, and never wearied of her patient service, but kept on between whiles with her own occupations. So it was not till everybody was in bed the next night—Miss Warne included—that Tom uttered his feeble cry for help. His aunt heard him instantly, and putting on her warm wrapper, took her place by his side.

"He's got me again," was Tom's information, given with great difficulty, for the fit was strong on him, and he could scarcely speak.

The usual remedies were administered, and after a half hour of weary suffering Tom lay back on his pillows panting and helpless.

"There, you are better now," said Miss Warne, kissing him.

"Yes, but don't go away yet. How kind you are! It is like mamma over again."

This was the first grateful recognition of her services that Miss Warne had received from Tom, and she hoped better things from it than from all his fits of contrition.

"I wonder how you can bear to do anything for me," Tom gasped again presently.

"It is because I love you, Tom, and that makes all my little services pleasant."

"Ah, but I don't know how you can. Mamma used to, but that was different, of course, and then it was before I had got to be so bad. Oh dear, I wonder what she would say if she were here!"

Miss Warne made no answer, fearing an argument would follow, and Tom proceeded to think the matter out for himself.

"What she tells me in her letter, I suppose. Oh, how I should like to hear it now! Is it too late?"

It was considerably past twelve; but as they had been turning night into day lately, that circumstance did not much matter, and Miss Warne asked where the letter was to be found.

"In my bundle," replied Tom. "Oh dear! I'd quite forgotten it! Did anybody put it away?"

"Yes, I did," said Miss Warne; and the bundle being hunted out, the letter, considerably stained by the rain, but still legible, was found at the bottom.

"Oh dear! I'm afraid it's nearly spoilt," said Tom. "I ought not to have taken it with me."

"Well, as you went, Tom, I think it was best you did take it. I should have been sorry if you had left it behind."

And then Miss Warne read the letter softly through—not all at once, for there was no keeping her eyes sufficiently under control for that, but in detached sentences, so that Tom had plenty of time for reflection as she went on. And when she had finished, a portion towards the close, to which he had paid particular attention, was, at his request, read again.

"You will find as you grow older," it ran, "that you have much to contend with, both in yourself and in the world; but before entering on any contest, be sure that it is a right one. There is such a thing as to fight a wrong battle all through life, and I need not tell you that to do so, dear Tom, is to bring on oneself nothing but shame and defeat. But only the great Captain of our salvation can teach you what and how to fight, and to Him I commend you, trusting that in his own good time He will enlist you under his banner, and make you more than conqueror."

"Ah," said Tom, struggling up higher on his pillows, "find the *right* thing to fight—that's what old Purkiss told me. It's queer they should both talk about that."

"Not at all Tom, as they both thought you, perhaps, too ready to take service on the wrong side."

"Ah, that was it, I suppose. And then it isn't fighting that's wrong, but *what* you fight?"

"Exactly, Tom; that is the great point, no doubt."

And the one that Tom evidently meant to consider, though he was choosing rather an inconvenient time for the occupation.

Miss Warne poked up the fire, and as its ruddy light shone through the room, she put out the candle, and told Tom she hoped he was going to sleep.

"Oh yes," he replied, "when I've done."

And with that assurance she had to be content, and go to bed; but the conviction that Tom was perched up on his pillows with wide-open eyes, and a question of absorbing interest to study, rather interfered with her own slumbers.

But in the morning all seemed right. Tom was nestling down snugly among his wraps, and his meditations, whatever they had been, appeared to be brought to a satisfactory conclusion.

"I've done now," he said, in answer to Miss Warne's inquiries; "only it's been very hard work."

She did not question him any further, and Tom, for a wonder, seemed to have nothing more to say. He took his breakfast in silence, had a comfortable doze, to make up for the night's wakefulness, and then greatly surprised every one by saying he should like to see Farmer Purkiss. Miss Warne felt a little uneasy at the request. It seemed rather like a preparation on Tom's part for the worst, and she anxiously inquired how he was.

"Oh, all right, thank you," replied Tom, cheerily, "only I want to get it over."

So as the desire seemed pressing, though no one knew exactly what it was, Farmer Purkiss was summoned, and in the course of the day he called at the vicarage, and was taken up to Tom's room by Charlotte. There was no tender greeting between the two old antagonists, for though the circumstance of his being sent for was rather hopeful, still Master Purkiss kept his distance for a while, and eyed Tom a little suspiciously.

"I wanted to tell you," said Tom, "that I've given up."

"Oh, have you!" replied the farmer. "Well, as I never heard of your being at any good, perhaps it's the best thing you could do."

"And that I'm going over to the other side," pursued Tom.

"The other side!" repeated Master Purkiss, "that'll be the right one, I expect."

"Yes; but it isn't because I'm afraid. You're not to think that, you know."

"Well, mayhap I shan't. It's because you're tired of holding out, I expect, and find there's no good to be got by it."

"Yes, it's partly that," replied Tom, "and partly because I think it will be pleasantest."

"Well, you're right there, Master Tom; it will be pleasantest, no doubt, and pay best in the end, which is the thing as matters most after all. Fighting for your own way does seem uncommonly fine till you've got it, and then you find that you ain't much the richer. There's my poor boy had his till he's tired of it, and you've seen what it's brought him to at last."

"Yes," replied Tom, recalling with unpleasant vividness Joe Purkiss's gaunt looks. "And now he's going to change sides?"

"He's done it, Master Tom, done it for ever, I'm thankful to say. Only it's too late for him to fight on the right side now. He's only just time to submit, and ask for mercy."

"And that is enough, Master Purkiss, isn't it?" said Charlotte, who was crying, without exactly knowing why.

"Well, it's enough for him, I trust, Miss Charlotte, but not for me. I'd have liked to have him a bit longer, and so would his mother; but we shall follow him before long, that's one comfort—follow him to the place where there's no two sides, and so no more fighting."

They let the farmer enjoy his pleasant prospect for a minute or two in quiet, and then Tom remarked

that he supposed there would be no objection to their taking him back now.

"Back where, Master Tom?"

"Why, to your class; I shall have it all to go over again, you know."

"Well, I hope you will, Master Tom, and in a way as'll do you good; but it won't be with me this time. I've got a scholar at home now that'll want all my care; and when he's done I expect my teaching days will be over. But there'll be somebody else at the school to take my place, and he'll be glad to see you, I dare say, and 'll do his duty by you better than I did."

"Oh, it wasn't that," said Tom; "it was my having something else to attend to; but I shan't now, and so it will be different."

"Well, I hope it will," returned the farmer; and as there seemed nothing further to settle between them, he shook Tom's hand heartily, and took his way homewards.

But Charlotte did not feel quite satisfied with what had passed. It had been a little puzzling to her altogether, and Tom's part, considering the circumstances, ought, she considered, to have been rather humbler.

"Don't you think, Tom," she said, a little later in the day, that it would only have been right to beg Farmer Purkiss's pardon?"

"What for?" asked Tom.

"Why, for behaving so badly to him in school."

"Oh, but that was when I was on the other side,

you know ; so it was all fair. Soldiers in different armies never beg each other's pardon for the blows they give."

"No, because they are natural enemies, perhaps ; but then you and Farmer Purkiss were not. You had changed sides before you began your fighting, Tom."

Tom had never considered that point, and was greatly taken by surprise.

"All baptized Christians are the Lord's soldiers," pursued Charlotte ; "and papa says, that if they do not fight his battles, they must be deserters to the enemy's side."

"So they are," replied Tom. "Then it wasn't fair play, after all ! Only if you look at it in that way, there'll be such a lot, you know, Charlotte."

"A lot of what ?"

"Why, to ask pardon of. There'll be papa and Aunt Janet, as well as old Purkiss, and I don't know who else."

"Oh, I shouldn't mind that, if I were you, Tom ; but still you must do as you like."

And having given the point some consideration, Tom determined to take Charlotte's advice. To refuse seemed like shrinking from his first loyal battle ; and as he had been so very staunch on the wrong side, it would not do, he reflected, to be lukewarm on the right. So he greatly surprised his papa the next day by marching into his study, and telling him he was going to beg everybody's pardon.

"Beginning, I hope, Tom, in the right quarter?"

"Yes, papa, with you."

"But I don't think that will be the right one, Tom. When we do wrong, the worst part of our guilt is that we have broken the Lord's commands, not man's. What does David say about it? 'Against Thee, Thee only, have I sinned, and done this evil in thy sight!'"

"Yes, papa; but I thought I ought to begin with you and Aunt Janet."

"But that was a mistake, Tom;" and after a minute's silence, Mr. Warne asked him if he did not think it would be best to set it right at once.

"Yes, papa, if you please;" and Tom knelt beside Mr. Warne at the study table, as he had often done before; but this time it was in a more humble spirit; and when he rose again, he felt that the other confessions of wrong-doing would be all the easier to make for having begun, as his papa said, in the right quarter.

And when they were over, and Tom had leisure to turn his thoughts to his own immediate prospects, a fresh anxiety began to press upon him rather heavily. Right opposite to his bed was the box which had been packed in preparation for his removal to Dr. Vane's, and whether it was still to take that long journey in his company, Tom did not in the least know. So far as he was concerned, he would have preferred, of course, that it should remain where it was, or, better still, be stowed away

in the lumber-closet out of sight; for his illness, though productive of decided good to him in many ways, had not increased his love for boxes. Besides, he had promised to give his attendance to Master Purkiss's successor in the Sunday-school, and not to know whether he should be able to fulfil that engagement, and see to various other little bits of business that Tom, in the usual fashion of convalescents, was beginning to plan, was very tantalizing. But Mr. Warne and Aunt Janet were provokingly silent in the matter—perhaps because their own minds were not fully made up; and in the meantime the black box stared Tom in the face till he hated it, he remarked in confidence to Charlotte, worse than Joe Purkiss's clutches.

"Then suppose we move it round to the other side," said Charlotte, "where you can't see it?"

"And what would be the good of that," asked Tom, with a spice of his old perversity, "when I should know it was there all the same?"

And so he waited on as patiently as he could, took his daily airings in the garden, and found his sufferings at night gradually diminishing. But still no one thought Tom progressed towards recovery quickly enough. Perhaps if he had been consulted himself as to the cause, he would have laid all the blame on the box; however, Aunt Janet preferred to form her own opinion, and at last it was decided that Tom must have a change.

"Oh yes," said Tom, when he heard of that

arrangement, "but where to? that's the thing. It isn't going to be Dr. Vane's and the box again, I hope!"

"Oh no, Tom, I think not," replied Charlotte. "They wouldn't call that a change."

"Oh, wouldn't they!" replied Tom, who thought that it would be a most decided one; and he expressed himself to that effect with more asperity than was advisable; but Tom had reached that trying point in sickness when the patient hardly knows whether to consider himself well or ill, and so his querulousness was excusable.

However, in the course of the day his fears were dispelled by hearing that instead of the journey to Dr. Vane's, a pleasant trip to the seaside was contemplated in Miss Warne's company, after which announcement Tom saw the contents of his box turned over with a sudden revulsion of feeling towards that unoffending article, that was surprising even to himself.

"I think it will be big enough for both of us, Tom," said Miss Warne, as she took out one pile of garments after another, "because you won't want all these things now."

"Oh no, aunt," replied Tom, with great readiness. "Where are they to go to?"

"Oh, back to the drawers, I suppose; Charlotte will see to that."

And of course Charlotte had to see to it at once, Tom letting her have no peace till she did; however, by way of making the business as light to her

as possible, he gave his own assistance with great good will.

And then the box was packed again—the dainty silks being stowed away in it first, and when it was finally corded, Miss Warne, with a tender recollection of Bridget left all alone in the far-off cottage, said she supposed she must soon be thinking of taking a final departure.

“No, you mustn’t, aunt,” said Tom, “because we couldn’t spare you. Charlotte would not know how to get on without you, and I might be ill again.”

“Nice unselfish reasons for keeping you, Janet,” said Mr. Warne. “However, I suppose you must take folks as you find them.”

“Yes, and be satisfied if they will only let me be useful.”

“Oh, you need not have any fears on that score. Only yesterday there was Croft sending you some message about his cough which I forgot to deliver, and Susan Wright giving me a hint that you had not been to see her all the week.”

“Poor things,” said Miss Warne. “Charlotte dear, don’t forget to look after them while we are away, especially Croft. I shall never forgive myself for having been offended with his wife once for being uncivil to me; but sickness and suffering bring us all together.”

“They do indeed,” said Mr. Warne, “and teach us some of our best lessons.”

And Tom, who fancied himself far more improved

by his six weeks' illness than he really was, thought how much they had taught him. However, he was not sorry that pleasanter things were at hand—health and a fortnight's enjoyment of the fresh breezes at the seaside.

But the satisfaction at his coming holiday did not extend far beyond himself. Hetty saw him start with great tears in her eyes, though the care of the treasure heap was to devolve on her during his absence, and Charlotte went back into the house with some of her old fears troubling her as to how she was to get on. But things were not so bad at the vicarage now as when Miss Warne arrived to see to them. Keziah, notwithstanding her unpromising beginning, was acquitting herself far better than Nancy had ever done, and the boys had kept pace with the increased order around them. As regarded the "parish business," about which Charlotte had been almost equally troubled, there was even more marked improvement. Reuben and Sarah Sykes, those old disturbers of the peace of the Sunday-school, were beginning to learn instead of playing tricks on their teachers; and Charlotte's special pupil, Nancy Turner, had been placed out by Miss Warne in a situation where she was likely to be better looked after than at Fairlawn. But at the old farm in Spring Lane things of course still looked very sad. Joe Purkiss was fighting his last battle there up in the quiet chamber from which he had stolen away so many years before. But there was no fear of defeat or failure now. He was trusting

to an arm stronger than his own, and before him was the promised rest, where, as Farmer Purkiss had said, "there would be no two sides; and therefore no more fighting."

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